

THE NORTHERN NOVEL IN CANADIAN FICTION

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## ABSTRACT

Leslie Fiedler formulates the genre of the northern novel for the fiction of the United States, and his ideas of north are basically satisfactory for a consideration of the northern novel in Canadian fiction. Canada is, geographically, a more northern country than the United States, however, and the physical and psychological influences of the north upon man are more intense in Canada. The northern experience in Canada requires special consideration from a Canadian point of view.

In Chapter One, I bring together the ideas of north proposed by Fiedler, W. L. Morton, Frederick Philip Grove, and certain members of the Group of Seven in an attempt to define "north" in Canada as a "way of thought" as well as a place. Out of the discussions of these selected critics emerge both a composite "idea of north", and a broad definition of the northern novel in Canada. The northern novel seems to possess, fairly consistently, the following qualities of the northern experience: a hostile natural environment, threatening man physically with death or psychologically with fear and repression, or both, a sense of the cyclical rhythm of existence--through both the seasons and the relationship between the city and the

wilderness--and a response to the wildernesses through either stoic endurance or warm affirmation of the human community. Only those who strive, through love and selfless action, towards this latter, unitive sense of community achieve justification for their pain and their struggles.

Chapter Two involves the application of this theory of the northern novel to fiction set in a domestic scene. Central characters may be apparent, but the community and the family are the human forces engaged in the struggles with the hostile environment and, sometimes, within the social group itself. Since the novels are domestic, they understandably conclude with some affirmation of the community.

In Chapter Three, I apply the theory of the northern novel to fiction concerned with the individual's struggle with the north. This chapter, more particularly than Chapter Two, reveals the pain of living alone in the north, and emphasizes the necessity of outgoing love and selflessness for survival..

## ABBREVIATIONS

Since I cite extensively the novels under discussion, only the first reference to each novel has been noted fully in the collection of references on pp. 158-165. Further references to the novels have been placed within parentheses, using the page number and the appropriate abbreviation, and inserted into the text. The following abbreviations for the novels are used:

<u>AMMH</u>	<u>As For Me and My House</u>
<u>EMS</u>	<u>Each Man's Son</u>
<u>DH</u>	<u>The Double Hook</u>
<u>Well</u>	<u>The Well</u>
<u>FE</u>	<u>Fruits of the Earth</u>
<u>SM</u>	<u>Settlers of the Marsh</u>
<u>WG</u>	<u>Wild Geese</u>
<u>VH</u>	<u>The Viking Heart</u>
<u>WNWH</u>	<u>Where Nests the Water Hen</u>
<u>YL</u>	<u>The Yoke of Life</u>
<u>HM</u>	<u>The Hidden Mountain</u>
<u>Cash</u>	<u>The Cashier</u>
<u>MC</u>	<u>Music at the Close</u>
<u>WSW</u>	<u>Who Has Seen the Wind</u>
<u>OPT</u>	<u>Over Prairie Trails</u>
<u>WN</u>	<u>White Narcissus</u>

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## CHAPTER ONE

Canada is a country usually defined by its northern environment: it is praised in its anthem as "the true north strong and free";<sup>1</sup> the Group of Seven, seeking the spirit of their land, believed that the path to Canada's unique identity lay through direct experience of its northern wilderness;<sup>2</sup> an eminent historian, after tracing the beginning of Canadian history to the arrival of the Vikings, similarly assigned Canada "a distinct, a unique, a northern destiny".<sup>3</sup> North clearly connotes not only a physical reality--prairies, forests, lakes and mountains--but also a pervasive consciousness, "a state of mind . . . The space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head".<sup>4</sup> The physical north informs the spiritual north, notably, and herein lies the significance of the physiography in the fiction under consideration in this thesis. The northern novel is an apt name, consequently, for the class of Canadian fiction which attempts to discover the spirit of this country's northland. Although a citizen of the United States, Leslie Fiedler, coined the phrase to describe certain features of his own nation's literature,<sup>5</sup> the qualities which he associates with that genre provide, in fact, an adequate beginning for the definition of the northern novel in Canadian fiction.

Fiedler equates north in his exposition with barrenness, cold and loneliness: the landscape is "'stern and rockbound'"<sup>6</sup> and physically hostile to the intrusive settlements of man. The essential fact of Canadian geography is, indeed, the awesome natural wilderness, manifested most impressively in the rugged Canadian Shield. Dominating nearly half of Canada's area with its stark granite formations, the Shield significantly composes Canada's heartland, "one of earth's most ancient wildernesses, and one of nature's grimmest challenges to man and all his works."<sup>7</sup> Add to this single range the innumerable lakes, the expansive prairies, the deep forests and the imposing Rocky Mountains, and the omnipresence, and often the omnipotence of the wilderness in Canadian literature is justified.

The scene, as Fiedler constructs it, "is domestic, an isolated household set in a hostile environment."<sup>8</sup> Whereas the specific adjective "domestic" limits the northern novel in Canada too strictly,<sup>9</sup> Fiedler is accurate in his emphasis of the struggle inherent in this genre. Man must constantly endure the trials which nature poses for him, and complete escape is not possible for the settler who strives to make a life in the north. Moments of triumph do occur--Fiedler's definition seems to lack all hope--but these victories come seldom and relieve the burden for only a brief time. Canadians, nevertheless, insist on testing their strength,

whether physical, psychological or imaginative, against the perils of the northern environment. For example, Sigurd Olson and his latter-day voyageurs relived the early years of Canadian history by travelling the dangerous routes followed by the fur traders in Manitoba;<sup>10</sup> the Group of Seven needed the north, "the sense of remoteness and stern resistance to the encroachment of man",<sup>11</sup> to liberate their artistic impulses. Whatever the confrontation sought, the involvement with the north brings about an insight into Canada's identity. The motivation is not masochism, but nationalism.

Fiedler sees only hardship in the American struggle with the north, and he denies both victory and nobility for his protagonists. This limitation is significant in Fiedler's concept of the north, because it is solely "the confrontation with the alien landscape"<sup>12</sup> which defines the northern novel in the United States. This clash between man and nature creates, in turn, "a milieu appropriate to the austerities and deprivations of Puritanism."<sup>13</sup> Struggle between man and nature necessitates, according to Fiedler, further conflicts between men and within each man. Fiedler's northern wilderness includes madness, broken marriages and guilt-ridden consciences, as well as settlers fighting starvation, geography and weather. Rather than pursuing this discussion of the relationship between physical and non-physical conflicts, Fiedler links, instead, the coldness of setting and theme to the style of the northern novel: "In

the field of the novel, the Northern is represented, in general, by books easier to respect than to relish, since there is not much savor in them, books which could easily be thought of as belles lettres." <sup>14</sup> Critics such as Claude Bissell have echoed this distaste with the style of Canadian literature in general:

the inflated style favoured by nineteenth century novelists has largely disappeared, but it has given way to conscientious flatness and a humdrum realism which are often just as unattractive. There are shining exceptions each year, but the characteristic is so general that it can be made the key to an analysis of our fiction. <sup>15</sup>

Bissell's criticism may be dated--he made it in 1954--but it still contains a measure of accuracy. Canadian fiction, the northern novel particularly, is seldom sensational, and generally centres upon the problems facing the average man, a plot pattern which Lionel Stevenson termed "a whimsical, sympathetic portrayal of naive characters in everyday surroundings." <sup>16</sup> That the northern novel in Canada appears ordinary and predictable at first glance is an unfair final judgment, however, for it is precisely the commonness of the novels which permits Canadian readers to understand more fully their involvement in the northern experience in this country.

The struggle for meaning, however, whether manifested in the search for a god, the compelling desire to express artistically man's deepest feelings, or simply the will to

survive in a hostile natural wilderness, is not a struggle peculiarly Canadian. Writers of all nations decry the human condition, but Canadians seem unique in their emphasis of the incessant struggle against the elements. Even when the physical environment merely composes the background for a novel, it still exerts, as Fiedler has suggested, a strong influence upon the psychological stability of the characters. Survival becomes both a physical and a psychological struggle in Canada, as Margaret Atwood has ably illustrated.<sup>17</sup>

Northrop Frye illuminates the special significance of physical survival in his description of Canada as

a country in which nature makes a direct impression of its primeval lawlessness and moral nihilism, its indifference to the supreme value placed on life within human society, its faceless, mindless unconsciousness, which fosters life without benevolence and destroys it without malice.<sup>18</sup>

It is the northern environment particularly which initially sensitizes Canadians to their human condition, and which necessitates the struggle for meaning and self-justification.

Fiedler's idea of the north as a fearful wilderness is but the initial step toward an understanding of the northern novel in Canadian fiction, however, and his concept of the cold, impersonal environment only becomes fully meaningful when merged with other statements on the north. One of the most illuminating statements on northern existence is W. L. Morton's emphasis of the fundamental rhythm of ebb and flow which seems to characterize the

northern life in Canada. As part of the impact of the wilderness in the determination of theme and character development in the northern novel, it is the seasonal cycle which becomes a dominant force in the rhythm of man's existence:

Canadian life to this day is marked by a northern quality, the strong seasonal rhythm which still governs academic sessions; the wilderness venture now sublimated for most of us to the summer holiday or the autumn shoot; the greatest of joys, the return home from the lonely savagery of the wilderness to the peace of the home; the puritanical restraint which marks the psychological tensions set up by the contrast of wilderness roughness and home discipline.<sup>19</sup>

Morton opens three significant avenues of discussion with this comment. He makes a peculiar sensitivity to the seasons a necessary part of the northern experience. This sympathy involves not only the farmers' practical dependence upon weather for the successful harvest of subsistence crops--in other words, reliance upon the seasons for bodily health itself--but also a vivid comprehension of the interrelationship between life and death which is archetypally symbolized by the seasonal cycle. The rhythm of the seasons emphasizes, consequently, both perception of the cycle's irrevocable conclusion in death, and a promise for a renewed beginning of life, vitality and meaning.

In addition to his emphasis of the cyclical nature of existence by the movement of the seasons, Morton suggests that the active movement between the city and the wilderness

also reflects the fundamental rhythm of ebb and flow. No standard criteria of division exist in the northern novel, however, between the city and the wilderness; writers agree that some contrastive separation is necessary, but the symbolic functions of the two states of life may vary considerably. Morton hints, on the one hand, that "home", a subsection of his city state, is the place of warmth and order which opposes the wild impersonality of random nature; the wilderness contains danger, and the home, however timid and meager, offers safety.

The majority of observers under consideration in this thesis, however, speak pejoratively of the urban effect on the northern environment and consciousness. The Group of Seven, according to one commentator, sought "the vastness and spiritual self-realization of nature . . . in implied contrast with the littleness and self-frustration of civilization."<sup>20</sup> Olson, similarly, makes a vivid distinction between the sparkling freshness and clarity of the sun's reflection on northern lakes and rivers, and the somewhat cheap urban equivalent of the shining metallic roofs of a uranium mine.<sup>21</sup> Frederick Philip Grove, finally, a particularly fierce supporter of the division between the city and the wilderness, advocates a new primitivism in his observation of the essential insight and nobility of people "in the poverty-stricken pioneer districts rather than in the well-settled and prosperous districts."<sup>22</sup> Settlement



and urbanization imply, for these three observers, corruption and constriction of man's purity and imagination.

The movement from the natural landscape to the urban setting, whether a liberation or an imprisonment, always involves a drastic change in the consciousness of the traveller. Morton notes the significance of this transformation in his designation of the almost schizophrenic quality of the Canadian psyche.<sup>23</sup> He points, particularly, to the ensuing repression of natural, human desires, an unhealthy state of tense "puritanical restraint" reminiscent of the psychological wilderness already described by Leslie Fiedler.

In such an oppressive atmosphere of constant change and resultant psychological insecurity, the Canadian must struggle incessantly to retain his identity. According to Morton, man cannot wholly achieve victory in this fight. Canadians must reconcile themselves to constant failure if they remain in a physical environment openly hostile to settlers:

Canadian experience teaches two clear lessons. One is that the only real victories are the victories over defeat. We have been beaten many times, defeat has been our national portion in America, but we survive and we go on in strength. And our experience teaches also that what is important is not to have triumphed, but to have endured.<sup>24</sup>

This is Morton's "psychology of endurance and survival",<sup>25</sup> one of the meaningful ways in which protagonists may confront the wildernesses of the Canadian north. It is

not an easy path to follow, and requires great courage; the heroes inhabiting Morton's north would triumph in relatively small ways. Morton's northern hero would not, like Beowulf, become his nation's saviour; his nobility would come simply from his insistent courage in seeking a life in a land which constantly threatens his concept of self:

You don't get out of the wind, but learn to lean and squint against it. You don't escape sky and sun, but wear them in your eyeballs and on your back. You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small. But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.<sup>26</sup>

The most satisfying accomplishment which Morton's hero can expect is "a kind of rigid calm",<sup>27</sup> a noble but rather strained life of stoic resignation. The hero makes this response to the hostile environment by simply living his life as it comes to him. He seeks neither escape nor the warming love of others to dissipate the coldness of his white-lipped endurance. His heroism lies in his courage to continue the struggle which enthralls him.

Frederick Philip Grove initially emphasizes, in like manner, that man is a Promethean figure doomed to pain and failure. Man cannot achieve total victory and must accept that his joy only arises from his struggle with awesome physical and psychological wildernesses: for example, "The tragic quality of Moses's fate . . . lies in the fact that

he accepted that fate of his; that he was reconciled to it; that he rested content with having borne the banner thus far; others would carry it beyond".<sup>28</sup> The significant quality of Grove's tragic hero is his indomitable will, his persistence against impossible odds:

To have greatly tried and to have failed;  
to have greatly wished and to be denied;  
to have greatly longed for purity and to  
be sullied; to have greatly craved for  
life and to receive death; all that is  
the common lot of greatness upon earth.<sup>29</sup>

The tragic hero of Grove's literary theory must fail in whatever endeavour he undertakes; as a human being, he seems bound irrevocably by his human condition.

The disparity which Grove sees between man's desire and its infrequent satisfaction manifests itself further in the aesthetic philosophy proclaimed by Lawren Harris:

The pain in any creative venture in the arts occurs in the wide gap between what we feel and see and its realization in an actual work of art. But our aspiration and vision have to be away ahead of our performance. And yet, no matter how many times we fail to bring our performance within hailing distance of our vision, we must never give up. The real basis and urge of the arts is divine discontent.<sup>30</sup>

Harris sees the creative act as unitive in its attempted reparation of the imaginative divergence which plagues man's whole being. In his famous Above Lake Superior he admittedly sought to lead others into a meaningful communion with "the divine forces in nature",<sup>31</sup> a mystical experience inspired, significantly, by the northern spirit caught

momentarily in the painting. The Group of Seven as a whole, in fact, felt the north to be an effective medium in which sensitivities were heightened toward an ultimate goal of communal, as well as individual understanding.

Grove echoes Harris's optimism for the northern experience in his adaptation of his theory of tragedy to the Canadian scene. The harsh northern environment, which generated fear and repression in the heroes of Fiedler and Morton, becomes the motivating force exciting warmth and hope in Grove's Canadian characters:

I was searching for an environment which would help me to express that individual, tragic reaction to life, the world, the universe--to God--which I felt to be alive within me. I sought it in vain in the United States . . . . What kept me in Canada, and more especially in the Canadian West was the fact that I found here more clearly than elsewhere the germs of such a new or distinctive shade in the generally tragic reaction of human souls to the fundamental conditions of man's life on earth.

. . . . .

In their [the Canadians'] eyes . . . I have seen a thing which I have never seen in the eyes of a European peasant. I don't know what it is: a new hopefulness perhaps. I don't know whence it comes; but it is bred by something peculiar to Canada; whether as some have asserted, it is the wider spaces of our plains, the greater height of our mountains, or the vaster extent of our indented shorelines, or what.<sup>32</sup>

Grove's hopefulness is not a naive expectation of paradisaical good fortune, but a knowledge, on the other hand, of the power of people united against a hostile environment. Grove's idea of north necessitates this banding together of settlers to ensure survival. Within the context of this

"vigorously human response"<sup>33</sup> to the threatening natural wilderness, Grove's hero in Canada ultimately becomes "communal, integrationist, even collective",<sup>34</sup> rather than solitary and quietly enduring. Only through creative acts such as love, the conception of a child and the expression of human truths in art--all of which involve a sincere giving of the self to another--can Grove's northern hero truly exist in the Canadian wilderness. As the northern hero--artist, particularly, he must believe that "Art is for man's sake . . . Man, the artist, creates for himself as a living part of mankind".<sup>35</sup> Art is unitive in its widening of the artist's and the audience's understanding; art brings people together imaginatively, and for northern artists, such as Lawren Harris, the spirit of the north is the compelling force urging this community.

This concept of the north as an inspiration toward unity for both the community and the individual is the second vitally important response to the physical and psychological wildernesses which always set the scene for the northern novel in Canada. Without this particularly hostile setting the novel is not truly northern. The warmth and feeling between human beings, whether placed in opposition to an apparently alien landscape or drawn from that environment through the deeper sensitivities of the artist or child, are ultimately contingent upon the physical wilderness. While less attractive and more painful, the quietly suffering pose

of those who choose to stand and fight the unyielding wilderness is equally noble: for these, however, life is circumscribed by defeat and proceeds by compromises only.<sup>36</sup> For both struggles, the natural and psychological environments initially remain desolate and fearful. Such a beginning is necessary for the novel to be both northern and Canadian. The irrevocable rhythm of the seasons, intensified by the analogous relationship between the city and the wilderness, can reflect either the deadening repetition of an existence imprisoned in body and spirit, or on the other hand, the possibility of liberation and rebirth at the point of the cycle's renewal.

The struggle with the hostile forces of the north becomes the significant spark of life and humanity which redeems the bleakness of the wildernesses of the northern novel. Heroes may struggle alone or as part of a community or family, and the struggle itself may be admirable, but it is important to note that the ultimate value of the hero's efforts is contingent upon the selflessness of his actions. If the community benefits directly from his struggles, his pain achieves justification through its further creation of hopefulness and unity. If no vitality arises directly and purposefully from his quest, the ultimate value of his achievements must be questioned.

To facilitate the discussion of the applicability of this theory of the northern novel to particular works of Canadian fiction, selected northern novels have been

divided into two classes: those particularly involved with a domestic scene and its conflicts, and those which emphasize the singular struggles of the individual. The former domestic type is concerned with the problems of a community, usually a particular family; the struggles involve not only disputes within the group structure, but also clashes between members of the group and the external environment. The latter type of northern novel which concerns the individual finds significant expression in novels relating the development of the artist and maturation of a child's understanding and imagination. Each figure undertakes a quest for meaning in the north through his own psychological or imaginative levels of existence.

While man's struggles for self-justification are not unique to Canada, the ominous presence of the rugged wilderness distinguishes the northern novel in Canada from other national literatures concerned with the human condition. In Canada, man contends ultimately with nature; if this conflict is not the central concern of the northern novel, nature lurks at least in the background, discouraging physical escape and daring man to throw off his fear and bravely assert his selfhood. It is precisely the hostility of the physical environment, furthermore, which gives this genre its northern quality.

The ideas of north proposed by Fiedler, Morton and Grove, all depend upon the presence of a cold, awesome wilderness; the northern novels under consideration in this

thesis are set, for the most part, in the prairies, the northern lake regions of the western provinces, or the Canadian Shield in Quebec--all rugged landscapes. White Narcissus and Each Man's Son, novels set in rural Ontario and Cape Breton respectively, possess some qualities of the northern novel, but lack the emphasis upon the wilderness which distinguishes this particular Canadian genre of the north. They are no less interesting without this stress, simply not as wholly northern as the other novels under discussion.

Confronted not only with the rigorous physical and psychological trials created by the varieties of Canadian wilderness, but also with the threat to a distinct life initiated from the south by the United States, Canadians can only be accurately defined through their struggle. Since Canada's cold northern environment initially necessitated confrontation for the sake of survival, it is this wilderness which lies at the roots of the uniquely Canadian experience. The importance of the northern novel as an expression of this basic quality of the Canadian way of life cannot be overestimated.



## CHAPTER TWO

The settler who ventures into the Canadian wilderness must endure the silence of the northern land if he intends to remain. Sigurd Olson's Lonely Land is not only the Churchill River district of Manitoba, but also the entire Canadian wilderness north of the thickly populated regions of southern Ontario and Quebec. One way to combat the loneliness is to establish a community; a family or a settlement, however small the numbers involved, usually asserts a warmth and comfort for the members of the group which effectively resist the physical and psychological effects of the wilderness. The domestic type of northern novel under consideration in this chapter emphasizes the struggles set in a northern community or family.

The nine novels under discussion in this chapter all focus upon a family or a community, but they differ slightly in their treatments of the group's struggles against the elements and within its own bounds. The first three novels, As For Me and My House, Each Man's Son, and The Double Hook, come to ambivalent conclusions: amid the devastating physical and psychological wildernesses, the resolutions achieved by the characters seem ironic and almost too good to be true. The second group of novels, consisting of The Well, Fruits of the Earth, and Settlers of the Marsh, come

to conclusions which are less abrupt and more certain than those of the first group. The central characters in the second group exemplify at random moments a tenderness and love which often fall prey to more selfish ambitions; within the context of such scattered acts of goodness and sensitivity, Chris, Abe and Niels seem to achieve a more stable place in the community at the end of their stories than do the Bentleys, Daniel Ainslie and James Potter. The last three domestic novels of the north, Wild Geese, The Viking Heart, and the first two parts of Where Nests the Water Hen, contain basically optimistic visions of life: the characters advocating the warmth of love or community life consistently exude vitality--or at least, as often as any men could be expected to have hope in the cold and awesome wildernesses of the north.

## I

The domestic novels of the first group, As For Me and My House, Each Man's Son, and The Double Hook, come to reasonably optimistic resolutions, but even such a concession grants them too much certainty. The Bentleys' problem cannot be solved completely through a change of scenery, and no amount of careful staging by MacLennan can invalidate the apparent incongruity of Ainslie's self-centredness and his desire to be Alan's father. Watson, similarly, circumscribes James Potter's liberation with the ominous cry of the omnipotent, impersonal Coyote. All three

novels achieve, at the same time, an accurate, all too real expression of man in his uncertain human situation. The ambivalence of the conclusions, the caution of the optimism achieved, expresses effectively the element of chance which seems to limit the power of man's judgments in an existence bordered by time and space.

The wilderness of As For Me and My House, the western prairie, vividly emphasizes the loneliness of life in that region and the need for warm human relationships. The awesome expansiveness of the land threatens man's security by its mere existence, and this effect gathers intensity with the coming of the dark prairie night and the rising of the penetrating, impersonal wind:

It's an immense night out there, wheeling and windy. The lights on the street and in the houses are helpless against the black wetness, little unilluminating glints that might be painted on it. The town seems huddled together, cowering on a high, tiny perch, afraid to move lest it topple into the wind . . . Above, in the high cold night, the wind goes swinging past, indifferent, liplessly mournful. It frightens me, makes me feel lost, dropped on this little perch of town and abandoned.

Ross captures most effectively in this brief passage the very real threat of the prairie's vastness upon the consciousness of a human being. Man eventually comes to see nature not just as an impersonal force ruled by chance, but as an actively malevolent spirit, "the terror . . . that was lurking there still among the skulls" (AMMH, 95). Such belief is not groundless paranoia, but justifiable fear

arising from confrontation with an alien landscape. Man, it seems, is truly lost in this wide prairie.

The prairie created by Sinclair Ross, for all its inherent peril, also reflects the darkness of the struggles which occur before it. The setting appears "like a quivering backdrop, before which was to be enacted some grim primeval tragedy" (AMMH, 59), and the Bentleys are, indeed, engaged in an ancient struggle. Ross places his protagonists in a state of limbo,<sup>2</sup> the town of Horizon, "at once nowhere and everywhere".<sup>3</sup> In such a place, they must fight not only an external barrenness, but also an internal coldness. They struggle for justification, for a semblance of meaning, in a life littered with self-deception, frustration, and a disintegrating marriage.

The breakdown in human relationships constitutes, in fact, the essential wilderness which grips the characters in As For Me and My House. The inhabitants of a Main Street town like Horizon suffer in two significant ways: meddlesome old women, exemplified by Miss Twill and Mrs. Finley, naively mark their days with malicious gossip and petty endeavours at sophistication. Their isolation amid the prairie and their daily confrontation with the same people on their one street necessitate their turning to each other, for better or worse, to achieve some sense of self-esteem--however false it may be. For people with a sense of objectivity, such attempts at meaningful communication clearly divide rather than unite, and only intensify the

social manifestation of the natural impersonality which surrounds Horizon. The Joe Lawsons of the community, the brave farmers who struggle for survival against nature rather than against the social wilderness of the town, are the sensitive men who deeply feel the pain of their lonely predicament; they sit with "faces pinched and stiffened with anxiety . . . in tense, bolt upright rows" (AMMH, 37), constantly at war with a more formidable foe than Horizon's ladies could ever imagine. The elements pound these settlers dry and brittle like wheat, yet they retain the vitality to defy the wilderness with their assertive posture; they achieve a measure of justification by refusing to submit wholly.

The Bentleys, the central figures of Ross's novel, are more complex than their neighbours in Horizon, but the conflicts which they find in their lives possess a barren coldness much like the town and the prairie. Mrs. Bentley, for example, feels an encompassing dread of life itself; she must struggle simply to start the day. She has internalized the darkness of the wilderness in her pathetic dissatisfaction. Like the Horizons in which she has lived, Mrs. Bentley feels "a queer, helpless sense of being lost miles out in the middle of it, flattened against a little peak of rock" (AMMH, 35). The dark and lonely wilderness not only threatens her physically on her many walks on the prairie (AMMH, 59), but also encompasses her psychologically in her silent, strained relationship with Philip. The style

in which she writes her diary even reflects the pain of her struggles against such wildernesses. Rather than giving her therapy, an outlet, perhaps, for her feelings, the diary may have given her more torture. Permeated with the dust of the prairie and the coldness of the human relationships in that environment, the diary possesses a dryness and tension which actually makes it a struggle to read. The suffering and arduousness of the confrontation with the north achieves no better expression than in the painful style with which Sinclair Ross has Mrs. Bentley compose her diary.

Philip Bentley's psychological conflicts also exemplify the darkness and torture of the physical struggle with the impersonal prairie wilderness. Trapped not only within his hypocrisy, "what he is and what he really was" (AMMH, 4), but also within a past which has stultified his spirit, Philip is unable to achieve freedom of thought and action. He could attain a partial victory by leaving the Church, by admitting that he is not fit to be a minister. His past has moulded his consciousness, however, and prevents such assertive action: "They say let a man look long and devotedly enough at a statue and in time he will resemble it. Perhaps that accounts for what he grew to be" (AMMH, 30). Attached by photographs to a father whom he never knew, young Philip Bentley silently rebelled, as his father had done, against the small town in which he lived, the Main Street town where his mother was "a common waitress"

(AMMH, 30).

Philip conceives his father to have been the quiet, lonely, suffering artist, and he strives after this image. Philip subsequently withdraws into a resigned inactivity which eventually makes him, like his father, an alien to both love and the community. Mrs. Bentley dreams, for example, that Philip will throw off his hypocrisy with a symbolic hurling of the Bible, but such assertion is practically impossible for him. His typical stance, derived from his father again, is "strained with a suffering, back-to-the-wall defiance" (AMMH, 15). Philip's inaction only plunges him deeper into his self-centred torment, rather than permitting him some semblance of self-respect.

Philip's inability to externalize his feelings, simply to chastise Mrs. Finlay for striking Steve, or more importantly, to release his artistic impulses, is the problem with which he struggles. In his sketching, a means by which he could conquer the spirit of Main Street which enthralls him, Philip only broods and tortures himself. Seemingly bent on pain, he seeks further isolation from his wife, "intent on something that can only remind him of his failure of the man he tried to be" (AMMH, 25); his cold, distorted drawings of the false-fronted towns only reflect his own emptiness and distortion. Such attempts at art are bitterly destructive, rather than warmly reparative and unitive.

The oppression of Philip's past, the quiet



resignation impressed upon his consciousness by his imaginary conception of his father, and his hatred of the small town which held him as a boy and still holds him, has apparently perverted his creative expressions in art. His spirit habitually accepts confinement, and the creative force imprisoned in this way becomes destructive in its ceaseless tortures of his conscience. His withdrawal into the conflicts of his own spirit promises no relief from the pain. He dreams of escape to another world, beyond the "cramp and pettiness" (AMMH, 29) of a Main Street, but his ingrained inactivity compels him merely to watch the trains depart and sadly listen to their lonely whistles on the prairie. The horizon which he would seek on one of these trains is not the Horizon in which he has become mired, notably, but the place of fulfillment, hope, and a happy, meaningful life.

Philip's wilderness is the essential loneliness into which his past and his threatening environment have forced him, a loneliness bred by shame and resignation, and maintained by fear and an inherited frustration and inactivity. Love and friendship with his wife could effect recovery, no doubt, by giving him security and self-confidence, but the Bentleys' marriage is a wasteland as barren as the prairie. They have no children, and apparently the one attempt to have a family produced only a stillborn baby. Mrs. Bentley tries bravely to bring warmth into their

relationship by making Philip aware of her love for him, but he is imprisoned in his stagnant consciousness and remains aloof from her gestures of love and understanding: "I slipped my arm through his then to let him know that it wasn't the dance I cared about, but he didn't understand. Or at least pretended he didn't understand, for I could feel that his arm was helpless and wooden too" (AMMH, 48). Philip's enforced loneliness, reflected in his periodic retreats to his study, has imprinted itself upon his mind so that he can almost shut out his wife at will: she becomes an alien to her husband, "an outsider" (AMMH, 8). The gap between them extends beyond Philip's aesthetics or his pursuit of knowledge. They are strangers who fail to communicate meaningfully and lovingly even on the most fundamental physical level: "Once I pressed closer to him, as if I were stirring in my sleep, but when I put my hand on his arm there was a sharp little contraction against my touch" (AMMH, 116). Philip's denial of his wife is almost involuntary, as if he has been conditioned against subtle expressions of tenderness. He rejects, in this same denial, the rebellion against their confinement which she has the power to initiate.

Mrs. Bentley's desperation at such an oppressive existence is understandable. She sees, at her darkest moments, the futility of their attempts to make a happy life: "The next town--the next and the next. There doesn't

seem much meaning to our going on" (AMMH, 103). The rhythm of Mrs. Bentley's life, confined and predictable in the past, will apparently lead only to spiritual and emotional death if she remains blindly loyal to a husband imprisoned in the monotonous repetition of Horizons. She sees no escape from the rhythm of ebb and flow--the movement of the seasons, the movement from one Main Street to another--which has only intensified the barrenness of their lives. The cycle of life is stultifying, clearly, when man lacks the warmth of selfless love to respond to the threat with vitality.

Mrs. Bentley's stubborn struggles against her natural and marital wildernesses bring some life into the deadening rhythm. She indicates further, significantly, that an awareness of a cyclical rhythm not only emphasizes the necessary confrontation with the inevitable end of the movement in death, but also demands a rebirth in the cycle's beginning. As For Me and My House begins on a spring day in April and ends in the same month a year later: as nature sheds her autumn decay to be reborn, the Bentleys, too, may undergo some analogous liberation during this phase of their life. They, admittedly, remain within the seasonal cycle of nature, but they begin, at the end of the novel, what may well be either a repetition of the past monotony, or a psychological renewal. Mrs. Bentley notes in one of Philip's sketches the juxtaposition of life and death in the cyclical movement of existence:

Philip's in his study drawing still.

Another little Main Street. In the foreground there's an old horse and buggy hitched outside one of the stores. A broken old horse, legs set stolid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth, the earth it stands on, the prairie that continues where the town breaks off. What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle. (AMMH, 69)

The Bentleys must struggle with life in this simple way to achieve a semblance of meaning for their life in the wilderness of prairies and Horizons. They must not only accept the moment of end in nature, the coming of winter, but also recognize the hope for a vital recreation in spring; they must apply this rhythm to their own lives, in the knowledge that confinement within the cycle of time and space does not prevent boundless vitality and love within that movement.

Ross supports, in such a response to the wilderness, Morton's "psychology of endurance and survival".<sup>4</sup> He goes beyond this resignation at times, but the moments of optimism eventually vanish, or fail to achieve full intensity and freedom. Judith's song briefly conquers the cold wind (AMMH, 38), but her grim fate is to be the sacrifice by which the Bentleys reserve an avenue of escape. Judith's gift of a child to the Bentleys' sterile marriage promises life and meaning in their future together. Shortly after they decide to adopt the baby (AMMH, 154), Mrs. Bentley urges Philip to "'make the break and get away from

Horizon'" (AMMH, 156). Philip inquires about the store in the city after his wife's urgings and their ostensible freedom from the Main Street existence seems imminent. Their rebirth is suggested further by the spontaneous burst of feeling--albeit angry bitterness---with which Mrs. Bentley chastises her husband for his adultery (AMMH, 163). The expression of anger is hopeful because of the truth of its feeling, and because they have finally touched each other on a basic, unpretentious level of communication. Only consistent meaningful interactions will destroy the symbolic study door which has come between them.

The false fronts of Horizon are blown down before the Bentleys depart, possibly symbolic of their new freedom from past hypocrisy within and between each other. Mrs. Bentley has ostensibly accepted her husband's child, and plans to become a piano teacher. Philip will sell second-hand books in the city. They break the deathly pattern of their Main Street existence by leaving the wilderness for the city, but Ross really gives no hard evidence that they have triumphed over the wilderness between them. Mrs. Bentley exhibits some hope, "a vacancy of beginning" (AMMH, 165), in her two Philips, but the manner in which the Bentleys leave Horizon puts their freedom into doubt. Mrs. Bentley writes:

It turns out now that all along they've liked us. Philip, they tell me, was always such an earnest, straightforward man. He's made it hard for his successor. And I minded my own business, came and went

willingly, was the sort of woman they could look up to. Last Friday they had a farewell supper for us in the basement of the church, made speeches, sang God Be With You Till We Meet Again, presented us with a handsome silver flower basket. It's the way of a little Main Street town--sometimes a rather nice way. (AMMH, 164)

Mrs. Bentley ironically suggests, in this series of statements, that the false front which she had learned to erect as a defense mechanism against the awesome prairie and its sterile human relationships (AMMH, 9) still remains. She may not yet rely, apparently, upon the love of a husband and a family for warmth and security in the north.

That the Bentleys could triumph over their wilderness simply through a geographical liberation--the movement from a wilderness Main Street to the city--is clearly fallacious because the essence of their wilderness is their interpersonal barrenness. Mrs. Bentley's self-deceptions, described above, suggest that she and her husband have not yet achieved the freedom through which they can consistently speak the truth of their feelings to each other. The escape from the monotony of Horizons is, however, definitely a step towards a new life. Mrs. Bentley's encouragement of Philip in his act to move to the city, and her determination to accept and love Judith's child as her own also emphasize her strong desire to struggle for happiness. Such optimism and confidence will hopefully release Philip from his stagnant past and permit him to use his energies creatively and lovingly. Only through a

cooperative effort toward such unity will the Bentleys achieve some meaning in their life together.

Hugh MacLennan repeats to some extent, in Each Man's Son, the plot pattern used by Sinclair Ross in As For Me and My House. As Philip Bentley's agonizing past and hypocrisy necessitate his own nagging guilt, so Daniel Ainslie's Calvinist "sense of sin"<sup>5</sup> plagues him throughout the novel. Ainslie, like his prairie counterpart, has the opportunity for peace through an adopted son. The reparative power of the children for the tormented men and their barren marriages is suggested by Ross and MacLennan, but the abrupt providential conclusions to which the novels come are almost inconsistent with the fearful wildernesses which the characters have always traversed.

MacLennan's Maritime novel lacks any physical wilderness as awesome as the Bentleys' expansive prairie. The only physically debilitating areas of the Cape Breton landscape are the hellish man-made coal mines. Boys willingly enter this prison, unaware that escape from it is virtually impossible. Their own poverty dictates that they must remain confined until the mine inevitably destroys their bodies and darkens their minds. Even the few who somehow escape the physical disintegration suffer the burden of spiritual imprisonment. Archie MacNeil boxes his way out of the mines, but his own sense of worthlessness, his innate Calvinism, prevents his consciousness from ever leaving the

darkness of the mines.

The only aspect of Cape Breton itself which inspires fear is the pervasive Calvinism which the island's history has imprinted on the spirits of the inhabitants. This island, according to MacLennan, seems to exude powers felt by sensitive Scots. Archie, who is all but unaware of his sense of sin, does experience a feeling of comfort when he looks into the sky over Cape Breton (EMS, 228); he acknowledges, at least, some vague historical bond to the landscape. Daniel Ainslie, much more involved than Archie in the nagging guilt of his religious heritage, undergoes a constant spiritual torture in every aspect of his life. His wife believes, significantly, that the trip to London, "away from Cape Breton with its memories and haunted Calvinism" (EMS, 206), would initiate a cure for the disease which plagues him. For all its beauty, Cape Breton's landscape is a constant danger to those sensitive to their Scottish tradition.

The essential facts of MacLennan's Calvinism in Each Man's Son are fear and failure:

If God looked down on them that summer, the kind of God their ministers had told them about, He must have been well pleased . . . Longing to do their best, they had discovered there is no best in this world. Yearning for love, they had found loneliness. Eager to help one another, they had made each other wretched. Dreaming of better lives, they had become totally discontented with the lives they led. (EMS, 200)

Mrs. MacCuish, the eccentric old woman with whom Alan once



eats, encircles Alan with her racked Calvinist co  
Her humility borders upon degradation as she live  
physical as well as spiritual abstinence and poverty.  
Daniel Ainslie's Calvinism is much more personal than Mrs.  
MacCuish's, and the pain which he experiences because of it  
is intensely human. Brainwashed by a father who was a  
Presbyterian minister, Ainslie was taught "that life was a  
constant struggle against evil . . . [and] that failure was a  
sin" (EMS, 85). His guilt spreads irrevocably throughout  
his whole being and he assumes the awesome responsibility  
for the many crises which surround him. His attempts to  
engage "the forces of evil" in these conflicts are noble and  
humanitarian, but the effects of frequent frustration and  
helplessness in many cases are intensified for a man as  
sensitive to failure as Ainslie. The ancient curse imprisons  
him as no physical wilderness ever could.

Ainslie's marriage with Margaret, limited in its  
reparative effects on his spirit by the Calvinist belief  
that physical desire "led hellwards" (EMS, 64), is an  
emotional wilderness with its lack of communication and  
warmth. Ainslie buries himself nightly in his Greek studies,  
behind a cold study door such as also excluded Mrs. Bentley  
from her husband's life. Margaret Ainslie, not steeped in  
her husband's tradition, suffers a "subterranean guilt of  
failure which every childless woman knows" (EMS, 201).  
Suspicious of her husband's affections because of his

sterilization of her, and jealous of the books which at his time, she sits apart from him, waiting for the act which will determine the direction of their life together. She cannot help him if his conscience necessitates his fighting his enemies alone and incessantly: "he was in a treadmill which he could neither slow down nor escape by jumping off" (EMS, 54). His belief in his own irrevocable confinement and sinfulness prevents the small, significant act which would free him.

His condition of non-action turns his turbulent emotions inside him, where ambition and self-criticism push his tolerance to the limit. His moments of contemplation centre on his own problems, and as a man, outside his medical profession, he speaks with a bluntness which is almost cruel. His remarks to Mollie in the buggy as he and his wife drive her to town reflect not the concern of "the Doctor", but the callousness of a man angrily confronting the ignorance and lack of values which constitute evil in his own vision; Ainslie blindly loses his warmth and humanity when he engages in his struggle. His self-centredness drives him to personal goals of achievement by which he might mitigate the effects of the sense of failure which immerses him in Cape Breton. His Greek translations and his study of medical journals do not free him--indeed nothing lacking the warmth of human beings can liberate him. Daniel's achievements inevitably fail to lift his fallen

self because he himself admits no escape from his fate:

Now that future was the present, and what had it brought? Only an end to seeing ahead. Not even posterity. Just the moment of hard work. The memory of work endlessly hard. The memory of striving, straining, heaving . . . Was defiance all that remained? (EMS, 40)

Indeed, the blindness to success fostered by Calvinism prevents Ainslie's realization that freedom is at hand in his medicine. Ainslie's practice of trying to share his patient's fear in order to achieve a total understanding of the particular case is a truly admirable and a very human quality. The sympathy is purely professional with Ainslie, however, and he goes out of himself as the Doctor, not as Daniel Ainslie the man. To merge the two worlds, see his wife as a woman also needing his care, see his patients as warm living beings as well as manifestations of the suffering human condition, is his freedom: "His doctor's intelligence awoke, and as it began to function the curse of his ancestors seemed farther away" (EMS, 65). The sense of "other", so necessary for a true doctor, sits deeply in Ainslie's soul, but it requires disentanglement from his Calvinist conscience in order to be warmly humanitarian. To achieve this end, Ainslie eventually experiences his own moment of purgatory.

Archie MacNeil suffers a torment more physically punishing than Ainslie's specifically Calvinist guilt, but it is still a torture linked inexorably with MacLennan's special Cape Breton mentality. Archie naively believes that

physical escape from the mines liberates him from them, but his mind clearly has never left their darkness. Unaware until too late how Downey has manipulated him (EMS, 102), Archie, like Ainslie, insists on believing that peace is contingent upon some type of worldly accomplishment: "'There are some that whill live their whole lives like oxes and cows,' Archie muttered. 'I am not one of them . . . I whill go home when I am the champion'" (EMS, 108; 109). Archie persists in his boxing, as Ainslie does in his Greek, yet both are futile efforts at self-justification. Both must realize love, or at least some sensitivity to another, to placate their suffering. Ainslie apparently finds it, whereas Archie must turn to an unfeeling whore (EMS, 113).

The movement to warmth and freedom is not easy, as MacLennan indicates: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit".<sup>6</sup> The loneliness of each of the major characters in Each Man's Son is undeniable. To achieve warmth in a community of human beings, those gripped by false goals must realize the utter futility of their selfish struggles before they see redemption; they must "die" before they live. Archie and Camire, each striving for his own separate goal, do not realize the inadequacy of their selfish quests until the final disaster:

each partial man struggles toward a different solution to his incompleteness, one which excludes all others. When their longings for wholeness draw them to Alan and his mother,

the pattern will no longer knit. Alan's role as each man's son is to witness the gradual forcing together of these disastrously alienated men.<sup>7</sup>

Ainslie is one of "these disastrously alienated men", but he confronts his inner conflict and becomes redeemed in a new, sensitive humanity. Realizing the utter alienation and oblivion to which his Calvinism has swept him, Ainslie places his belief in perspective, accepts it, and decides to strive after a vital and meaningful life:

With a slow movement, as if coming out of a deep sleep, Ainslie sat up and looked at the sky. With longing for continuance brimming in his blood, he had looked ahead on his days and seen total emptiness. He had reached his core. And there he had stopped. He got to his feet and looked down at the brook. At that moment he made the discovery that he was ready to go on with life . . . Now he could once more think about the people around him. (EMS, 220;221)

With this liberating act, Ainslie commences the movement from darkness and loneliness toward warmth and community.

Ainslie ultimately places all his values into perspective--he unites his profession with his humanity--and realizes "that in comparison with a loving human being, everything else is worthless" (EMS, 243). His belief in the value of mankind complements his decision to escape Cape Breton physically and validates his redemption; unlike Philip Bentley, Ainslie seems to confront both the wildernesses which encompass him. His love for Alan transcends the level of an experiment in social mobility and

seems to become warm, selfless and deeply human. The boy completes the Ainslies' lives by freeing the love in them which guilt had stifled. Alan's need both required their devotion and sincere kindness, and liberated the love from their cramped spirits; they are free now to love each other as well as the boy.

MacLennan asserts the ultimate hopefulness of life through his optimistic conclusion---more, at least, than the ambivalence suggested by Sinclair Ross---but the contrived ending adds an unfortunate note of fantasy. Grove would undoubtedly deny the plausibility of such a "happy ending".<sup>8</sup> The vivid pain and fear with which MacLennan infuses the attitudes and life styles of the people of Cape Breton is an accomplishment, on the other hand, in its recreation of a tormented spiritual state. The wilderness of the Calvinist conscience is starkly real and believable, and love and selfless feeling do, indeed, seem to be the valid ways by which it can be humanized and endured. MacLennan's vision of the north, in spite of the staged conclusion, asserts a hopefulness akin to Grove's, a belief that in Canada the human condition does not deny the possibility of some warmth amid the cold, some love within the barrenness.

Sheila Watson's The Double Hook similarly climaxes with the freeing, decisive action of James Potter, but even his courage cannot permanently allay the omniscient power of Coyote:

And from a cleft of the rock she heard the

voice of Coyote crying down through the boulders:

I have set his feet on soft ground;  
I have set his feet on the sloping  
shoulders of the world.<sup>9</sup>

Coyote is all-encompassing, and by placing man in such an uneasy state of tension and fear demands that he prove his value as a man by asserting himself in action and assuming the responsibility for his decision. Coyote rules the land of The Double Hook as fear, the unknown, the darkness, any force, in fact, which confronts man and thereby urges him to act in order to preserve his freedom and dignity. James Potter leads the community's action by killing his mother, and everyone, save Theophil, perhaps, responds in the aftermath of the initial event. This movement of the population as one, the communal feeling which develops out of James Potter's courage, is the ultimate power which confronts Coyote's evil and restores love for a time in the physical and psychological wilderness.

The landscape in The Double Hook is reminiscent of that in Camus's The Plague. The sun bakes the land into a white dusty dryness which collects on the inhabitants' bodies and minds. The effect is deceptively destructive, both in its subtlety and in its intensity. Each man's loneliness encompasses him, disintegrates his community, and prevents action for all but the few who possess the courage to break out of their prison. In this state of suspended animation, men exist without really living. They

deny their humanity, their place in the community, by refusing responsibility for their neighbours. Their rule of life, in this spiritual and physical drought, is apathy.

The cause of such a deadening of the spirit in The Double Hook is Coyote, and his queer lieutenant, old Mrs. Potter. All beings live under Coyote's eye, as Watson indicates by the graphic genealogy on the first page of her novel. The characters' lives seem to have been preordained "until one morning in July" (DH, 19), the moment of James Potter's action. Coyote discourages such bravery and immediately qualifies the effects of the murder: "In my mouth is the east wind. Those who cling to the rocks I will bring down/I will set my paw on the eagle's nest" (DH, 24). Coyote laughs at man's insignificant physical triumphs--James Potter's included--which are essentially ineffectual against his awesome spiritual power. Man may not really escape physically, either through action or through attempts to flee Coyote. Man's triumph must be internal, must alter his psyche with a decisiveness which can confront Coyote on his own ground.

The spirit is Coyote's essential battleground. He may physically intimidate man afar with his cries, but his arousal of man's fears constitutes the essence of his power: "In my mouth is forgetting/In my darkness is rest" (DH, 29). He immobilizes man, and lures him into a stasis which permits the divisive power to spread, like a plague, to all men. Locked in a prison of spiritual darkness, man



is inactive and, for all intents and purposes, dead. Such is the paralysis which Mrs. Potter emanates when she fishes near Ara: "Yet as she watched the old lady, Ara felt death leaking through from the centre of the earth. Death rising to the knee. Death rising to the loin" (DH, 21). Like Coyote, Mrs. Potter spreads a death which eliminates the essence of life and meaning from man. Fishing alone for the truth which her subservience to Coyote ironically prevents her from ever realizing, Mrs. Potter represents the blind individual seeking a justification which can really only be found in the company of other men. This quest drives her, as it drives MacLennan's doctor, to pursue her activities with "a concentrated ferocity" (DH, 20), a self-centred mania exclusive of all warmth and humanity.

This is the double hook which Sheila Watson places at the centre of her vision, the ironic duality of man's search for meaning in the wildernesses of nature and society:

He doesn't know that you can't catch the glory on a hook and hold on to it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear. (DH, 61)

For example, James, in addition to his confrontation with his mother, must also assume the responsibility for her murder. Kip, too, is susceptible to the power of the double hook through his insight. He is truly Coyote's servant (DH, 35) because he sees to the essence of things so clearly,<sup>10</sup> but he also inspires fear in other people by such perception.

He forces James to strike him blind for "Looking wise. Knowing too much. Like the old lady" (DH, 42). Kip is associated with the brilliant light of revelation, the confrontation with truth which illuminates so completely that it strikes onlookers senseless. James is initially unaware of the duality of the struggle for meaning and self-justification, and naïvely attacks Kip as he had earlier struck his mother.

The place which Coyote attacks most fiercely with his darkness is man's spirit. The apathy of the characters is the plague which infects them. Greta is the symbol of the divisive self who refuses, like Mrs. Potter, to engage in a warm relationship with anyone. Angel classifies Greta, in fact, as an agent of destruction who tries "to break up other birds' nests" (DH, 54). Greta is mired in "her mother's doom" (DH, 111), caught in a prison of her own distinct self and refusing to admit any help. She eventually seeks the ultimate power, Coyote, through suicide. Such escape is invalid, however, because she thereby denies her humanity, her intimate connection as a living being with the human race. A refusal of this responsibility through a solitary retreat into madness or suicide makes the value of her freedom questionable.

Theophil becomes the incarnation of apathy in Watson's vision of man: "Theophil did not hear the wagon as it passed. He turned and pulled sleep about him like an

empty sack" (DH, 127). Theophil sits uninvolved in his cabin, usually unconscious in sleep and actually totally unaware of anything but himself. Coyote has driven him inside himself, immobilized him with a fear of action, and made him exclude what he should permit to enter: "Theophil's let fear grow like fur on his eyes" (DH, 58). Theophil, unlike Kip, wants an existence apart from other men, a blindness to all living things but himself.

While Greta and Theophil are the loci of the plague's destructive influence, the apathy effectively touches all the people in the community, including its leader, James Potter. Every living thing has "a hanging and waiting look" (DH, 100)--the Widow, Kip, the Widow's boy, even the animals in James Potter's yard. All creatures await the guidance to freedom which apparently James Potter alone can give. Until he frees himself from his fear no other person can act: "Since the fury of the morning he'd not been able to act. He'd thrown fear as a horse balks. Then he'd frozen on the trail. He was afraid. He was afraid what Greta might do" (DH, 42-43). Until he fully assumes the responsibilities for his actions, James Potter will be caught in the same wilderness which holds his neighbours. The spirit of his mother appears before him as it does before Ara (DH, 20), Felix (DH, 22), the Widow's boy (DH, 25), and the Widow (DH, 29). With her evil presence still affecting their lives, the community cannot function effectively together.

Once James realizes the folly of trying to ride from his mother's influence, he finally stands free from her. Simple defiance liberates him when he refuses to succumb to a fear of responsibility: "Free at last, his true escape lies in his return".<sup>11</sup> Relinquishing his money gladly, he sheds his past and his mother like stifling cocoons and emerges reborn in a land which sympathizes with his renewed vitality: "James stood for a moment in the moonlight among the clumps of stiff sage which shoved through the seams and pockets of the earth" (DH, 109). James comes to refresh his suffocating neighbours with his courage. Like the plants which suddenly assert life in the barren wilderness, the people around James Potter also begin to admit, by their actions, the value of community responsibility, the simple hope in loving other human beings.

Lenchen actually bears life within her, and the birth of her child is the graphic expression of the renewal of this community. Felix's house, too, contains "the stir and breath of living things" (DH, 120); it is the haven for both Lenchen and Kip, and the scene for Felix's own rebirth (DH, 126). The Widow accepts her daughter's pregnancy and cuts out a singlet for her new grandchild (DH, 115-116). Ara, William and the Widow's boy see Coyote, hear his declaration, but are not enthralled by fear: "Fear faced is fear conquered".<sup>12</sup> Confident and standing together, the community does not waver at Coyote's cry. The less strenuous response, on the other hand, is to enter Coyote's numbing

darkness willingly: "In my fear is peace" (DH, 98). Those now denying that fear must necessarily struggle to maintain balance, but the union of men in friendship and love creates a warmth which eases the pain of the conflict.

James returns to his people reborn, too, to accept his child and build a new life, but he also confirms other knowledge with his return. Futile as his attempt at escape to the city may have appeared, it was a necessary stage in his coming to awareness:

I ran away, he said, but I circled and ended here the way a man does when he's lost. I've a notion, William said, that a person only escapes in circles no matter how far the rope spins. (DH, 132)

Caught in a rhythm which does not permit escape, man's freedom comes from his acceptance of his human condition, and his struggle to achieve justification when none seems possible. The struggle permeates city and wilderness alike, because as Angel says, "if loneliness is being in one's own skin and flesh, there's only more lonely people there than here" (DH, 86). This loneliness of men driven apart by fear and defensive attitudes of self-preservation is the essential fact of Coyote's physical and psychological wilderness.

As part of the cycle of life, James Potter fittingly destroys in order to create. He must lose money in order that he may gain another deeper wealth; he must assume responsibility for murder in order that he may be free:

He would simply come back as he'd gone. He'd

stand silent in their cry of hate. Whatever the world said, whatever the girl said, he'd find her. Out of his corruption life had leafed and he'd stepped on it carelessly as a man steps on spring shoots. (DH, 127)

James comes back to admit his guilt and reestablish his bond with Lenchen. The community will now rise from its ashes to live again in friendship. Even the final cry of Coyote cannot stifle completely the hopefulness of Watson's renewed community.

## II

The second group of domestic novels of the north, including The Well, Fruits of the Earth and Settlers of the Marsh, relates, more thoroughly than the first group, the development of self-knowledge within a community. The central character in each novel possesses the capacity for love and meaningful, decisive action, but he immerses himself in superficial, futile, selfish endeavours which give no ultimate satisfaction. The final decisions of Chris, Abe and Niels to assume the responsibility for their actions exemplify a recognition of the value of community life and the essential rebirth of each man through a belief in love. Chris and Niels will live hopefully for the love of a sensitive honest woman, and Abe will now realize the comfort of a family and the respect of a community. The novels discussed in the first group conclude with similar affirmations of community life, but the resolutions are more

sudden and seem to be less a final stage in a developmental process than the three novels of the second group.

Sinclair Ross's The Well, typical of a northern novel, opens in a wilderness, near a prairie village called Campkin. Suspended alone amid the wide prairie, linked to the city by a single thin railroad track, inhabitants of Campkin must unite in order to conquer the loneliness. Chris Rowe, a city-dweller, is overcome by the land's flatness.. He feels "oppressed, uneasy",<sup>13</sup> like an alien who cannot possibly endure the threatening expansiveness of the landscape. The deep prairie night, as in As For Me and My House, constitutes an even more pointed threat to man, preventing action by merely being beyond his comprehension:

he made out the light of a neighbour's window a mile or more away . . . . From here to the light--that was a measurable distance, and with a great grasshopper leap of his mind he reached it. Reached it, sickened, swayed. It was only the first leap. He could never gather himself for the next one, into the wet black void that lay beyond. (Well, 175)

The smallness which the prairie man assumes when engulfed by the landscape distinguishes this wilderness from Chris's urban wilderness on Boyle Street. The prairie landscape, where a man must closely examine his own ability to endure the hostile environment and then assist others in their survival, is the only possible scene for Chris Rowe's coming to awareness. By his reliance upon others for not only an initiation into the ways of the wilderness, but also an

opportunity to judge himself, the human sympathy buried in Chris Rowe achieves freedom.

Chris's psyche, clearly, is the wilderness which must be made warm and habitable. Initially trapped in his Boyle Street consciousness, Chris tries to flee his past on trains while simultaneously keeping his Boyle Street mentality. His fear of the wilderness surfaces at times, but the true plague of his spirit is his retention of his urban attitudes. Totally self-centred, Chris plots to "put the screws on Larson" (Well, 86), an old man who, for whatever the motivation, freely offers aid to Chris. Nagged at times by his conscience, Chris continues, nevertheless, to use his employer for his own greedy purposes (Well, 201). He uses both Sylvia and Elsie Grover to gratify his inflated male ego. He feels tenderness rarely for the two women, and once the challenge of "scoring" with them is met, he no longer requires them.

Chris's past grips him with more conscious injury in his paranoia about his assault of Baxter, the reason for his flight from Boyle Street. He has vivid nightmares about Baxter and Boyle Street, and suspects that people in Campkin will eventually come to know the events of his past. Larson and Sylvia are aware of his crime, in fact, through Chris's ramblings while he sleeps. Sylvia tells him that Larson prompts Chris in his sleep to learn his past, but Chris wisely assumes that she alone commits the eavesdropping and plans to use the confessions against him.



Sylvia is, in spite of Chris's greed and self-centredness, the standard of evil in The Well by which other misdeeds are measured. She is, indeed, "the intruder" (Well, 88) who attempts to destroy the happiness in Larson's life and in his relationship with Chris. Like Chris, she was a city-dweller, presumably hardened by the lack of warmth in that environment. She is greedy, and devoid of pure sympathy, to an even greater extent than Chris is. She is indifferent to the crisis at the birth of Fanny's colt (Well, 207), and shows her lack of warmth through her refusal to aid living creatures in their struggle to live. She exhibits a coldness, which even awes Chris, in her precise, analytical preparations for their lovemaking (Well, 131-132) and for the murder of Larson (Well, 185-188). Sylvia plans these acts of passion in a mechanical, business-like manner which emphasizes the horror of their actual enactment.

Chris's final confrontation with Sylvia's cold, cruel power truly tests the strength of his will. Having shot Larson and realizing the horror of the crime, Chris immediately tries to help him; he is torn from his sympathy for the old man, however, by his response to Sylvia's commands, "the mechanics of obedience" (Well, 246), and Chris follows her once again. Only when he realizes that Larson, like Sheila Watson's Mrs. Potter, will haunt the murderer forever, does Chris stand firm and refuse to obey Sylvia.

He knows that his greatest pain has heretofore come from his memory of Baxter. Physical burials of enemies clearly do not erase their effect upon the minds of sensitive survivors. Chris must assume his responsibility in order to initiate survival in the wasteland which he has made of his life.

Such assertion is the essence of Chris's hope for the future. Containing the potential to love and sympathize deeply, Chris needed special circumstances for his liberation. Living within old Larson's kindness and selfless giving, Chris's "surviving streak of honesty" (Well, 152) often breaks through his Boyle Street superficiality. He begins to take pride in his performance of menial farm jobs because it effects changes in his opinion of himself: "it had something to do with being a man" (Well, 158). Chris eventually rejects the false values of Boyle Street (Well, 176), and permits himself to sympathize with other living creatures. Much to his physical disgust, he tries to help old Fanny with her colt (Well, 207). Shortly after this event, he feels sympathy for Larson as they sit in the church at the funeral of Ole's son. Chris feels strongly drawn to Larson to comfort the old man in his sad memories of his own dead son. Chris is, in fact, the only person in the novel who becomes Larson's true friend. Attracted by the old man's simple love for his memories, his well, the few watermelons, his land, Chris more and more takes Larson's side when gossips or Sylvia are antagonistic. He finally admits his deep affection for the old man---indeed for any warm, living

being---in his resistance to Sylvia and his vain attempt to aid the dying Larson.

Chris comes to realize that his only means of achieving meaning in his life is his assumption of the responsibility for his actions. Part of the confrontation with his inner self involves his acceptance of Elsie Grover, and his special attraction to her. Once he admits the folly of his egotistical Boyle Street attitude to women, he begins to sympathize with the girl whom he used, and ultimately, envisions her as a model for emulation:

There was strength there too . . . To take him as he was, to believe in him, to suffer and go on suffering. He hoped so. Leaning forward a little in the pew, his fingers locked, his lips wincing, he kept his eyes fixed on her as if waiting for a sign. (Well, 216)

Elsie, inspiring as she does in Chris this deep feeling and devotion, becomes his reason for living. Hoping to live happily again in Elsie's love--a life by no means confirmed by his past treatment of her--Chris makes his crucial decision to face the consequences of his shooting Larson. Indeed, Chris's choice of "the rope" (Well, 256) rather than Sylvia seems grim to her, but his simultaneous achievement of self-justification and meaning in his own life produces a warmth which even the threat of death cannot overcome. Even Chris's necessary return to the city to confess to his assault of Baxter does not promise to affect his redeemed vision of life.

Sinclair Ross contrasts the city and the wilderness

many times in The Well, the former exemplified both by Boyle Street with its "insolence, pride [and] defiance" (Well, 176) and by Sylvia with her inhuman manipulation of other men, and the latter illustrated by Larson in his simplicity, honesty and willingness to give freely of himself. Chris's rebirth in the wilderness, "the beginning of a new kind of self-sufficiency" (Well, 57) is the profound renewal of Chris Rowe's psychic wilderness, and although it was contingent upon the reparative setting and the presence of Larson and Elsie, the effect is complete, irregardless of the nature of his future environment. The firmness of Chris's final "landing" (Well, 256) emphasizes his assured belief in the strength of his decision.

Chris Rowe's renewal in a community north of his city home is a typical feature of the northern novel. The north is often a place of self-discovery, redemption and rebirth, a place which thereby permits the explorer to endure and survive the rigors of the environment in happiness. Abe Spalding, Grove's protagonist in Fruits of the Earth, seeks to conquer the prairie land and establish the greatest farm in the country; he discovers only late in his life that the wilderness for such an ambitious man as he really lies, ironically, within the self-destructive power of his desire to possess. This is the true wilderness which he must tame in order to live his life peacefully and happily.

Abe's initial confrontation, however, involves the physical wilderness, the prairie landscape itself. His

"impression of an utter loneliness"<sup>14</sup> with his closest neighbour being a man bushed through isolation in the wilderness, does not arouse fear in Abe, but anger to assert his own vitality against the threatening environment. Some people would group together to preserve warmth within a community; Abe, on the other hand, "would change this prairie, would improve himself on it, would conquer its spirit" (FE, 23). Noble as Abe's struggle promises to be, it is a very lonely undertaking, and Abe is ultimately doomed to failure by this very loneliness. The people who submit to the awesome land and its silence admittedly appear restrained and confined (FE, 137), but they at least have the comfort of numbers to allay the pain of their lives.

Abe's task is the integration of his community, both his family and his township, into his struggle with the land. Only at that time can he claim a valid triumph. Abe is initially unaware of this fact, however, and must neglect one in order to pursue the other. Abe's admirable motivation to conquer the wilderness soon becomes subordinate to a simple desire to own more land: "He must have more land! He must get to a point where he farmed on a scale which would double his net income from a decreasing margin of profit" (FE, 51). The hint of compulsion in Abe's thoughts testifies that cold, hard economics have replaced his human will as the motivating force for his farm. The cry "I've got to have more land" (FE, 54) often occurs in one form or another in Fruits of the Earth (FE, 30; 38; 40; 54; 60).

Abe, in this way, becomes inextricably bound to a force beyond his control. He admits that his blind ambition has actually led him to become a slave of the land (FE, 54; 100), rather than the land a servant of him, as he had originally intended. Abe eventually realizes the ultimate worthlessness of his huge mansion and farm, and the essential coldness of his economic wealth, because it is not supported and complemented by the warmth and security of a loving family.

Abe has built a tall barrier of indifference between himself and his family, however, through his blind devotion to his work. Exhausted from labouring all day, Abe lacks the energy to communicate with his family in even the simplest way (FE, 45; 50). He and Ruth eventually sleep apart because he needs his rest for his next day's work. They become strangers, not only denying the warmth of a sexual relationship, but also rejecting all forms of communication in a sterile "habit of silence" (FE, 152). The children mature without a father, confiding secrets to their mother and each other, but not daring to interrupt their father in his work. Abe realizes intermittently that life is bypassing him, but he needs a devastating example of the evil of his ambition to make him really question his values. The death of Charlie in the service of his father makes the boy a sacrifice to economics, crushed beneath Abe's ambition as much as beneath the wheels of his wagon.<sup>15</sup>

Abe not only lives outside the warmth of the family,

who alone can make his work meaningful, but also denies his community, "worst of crimes in western Canada" (FE, 164). He persistently neglects to engage in even the most brief and friendly conversation with his neighbours because he has no time (FE, 27; 29; 59; 82-83). The death of Charlie jars him into considerations more deeply human than weather, crop yields and grain prices. He begins to speculate on death much as Nicoll had earlier done (FE, 40), and seems to move, by this sensitivity, toward a greater awareness of his human condition. His pride and shortsighted concern for himself apparently still grips him, however, and his defeat at the poll by Wheeldon drives him into isolation. Rather than struggling against his opponent's legal trickery, Abe resigns his position in the regional government and thereby refuses his responsibility to the other men in the community. He retreats from the ambiguous justice of politics in a way in which he would have described as meek and cowardly in the days of his early struggles with the prairie landscape.

Abe's submission is almost incongruous with his meditations on "the mysteries of cosmic change" (FE, 134). Living for a brief time in the shadow of Charlie's death, Abe realizes to some extent that his struggles to achieve economic domination compose only a small portion of the struggle of which he was heretofore unaware. His necessary human subservience to time and the inevitable decay and death of all living beings suddenly fill his consciousness with

confusion:

The moment a work of man was finished, nature set to work to take it down again. A queer thought, that. And so with everything, with his machines, his fields, his pool; they were all on the way of being levelled to the soil again. (FE, 134)

The strength of his own ambition had negated his awareness of his own transience for many years, but now he begins to see the prairie not as a thing to be conquered, but as a symbol of the intimate link between birth and death, between simply living and the incessant struggle to justify that life. He experiences, in the author's theoretical terminology, "the generally tragic reaction of human souls to the fundamental conditions of man's life on earth".<sup>16</sup> The years pass Abe quickly in their irrevocable movement; immersed in his work, life is measured by the jobs to be completed, not by the age or growth of his young family. Grove emphasizes the rapidity of the passage of time for Abe by beginning chapters with "A year had gone by" (FE, 25; 34; 119), and ultimately, with the more significant "The years went by" (FE, 132).

Abe's struggles with time, the land, and death are supplemented, furthermore, by a conflict with the expanding city. Initially prompted to emulate the city in the construction of his house (FE, 37), Abe soon assumes the typical position of his creator, Grove, in derogating the superficial excess of city life. Country children bused to city schools acquire habits of insolence and defiance. (FE,



155; 182)--qualities of Sinclair Ross's Boyle Street mentality. The city spreads corruption like a disease, staging the drunken orgies in the old school and advocating an immorality which even touches Abe's daughter Frances with pregnancy. "The Lure of the City" (FE, 218) necessitates a strong response from the moral leaders of this rural community in order to prevent the soiling of their honest simple standard of living. Although he was compelled, by the inevitable growth of the city, to accept the mechanization of his farm (FE, 41) and the loss of his son, Jim, to the job opportunities afforded by technological progress (FE, 222), Abe does possess the power to stand before the tide of moral and psychological degeneracy which is creeping into the district. Abe's positive decisive action to halt the immorality spread by the dances at the schoolhouse redeems him from the isolation within which he has been mired since his embarrassment at the poll.

The catalyst for Abe's release from his self-imprisonment is the warmth of friendship from his usually reserved brother-in-law. When the doctor unburdens his past to Abe, he gives him significant advice: "'We act and blunder. We can never tell. Perhaps this knowledge may help to sustain you'" (FE, 259). The doctor's talk to Abe is important not only because he kindly wishes to prepare Abe for the blow of his daughter's moral error, but also because he establishes a bond of intimate communication

with Abe which he has never known. The advice to choose boldly and to take action bravely where he feels he must is significant in the light of Abe's final assertion of power, but the tone in which the doctor speaks, so freely and so sensitively, seems to be the motivating force for Abe's immediate awareness of others.

When Abe comes out to Ruth, he perceives her with a new feeling of warmth and intimacy: "to-day he saw that this woman, human like himself, was stirred to her depth; and he noticed her immense relief at his return" (FE, 260). Man and wife appear closer than ever before, and indeed, they are one in their reaction to the legal jungle in which Ruth innocently tried to achieve true justice. Abe shows a kindness and respect for Ruth in their conversation in the barn which she has probably never received before in their married life.

Abe decides, after leaving Ruth, to face his past errors of judgment, accept the sins of his daughter, and still strive to create a meaningful community. He will assume the responsibility which he had once unwisely denied:

True resignation meant accepting one's destiny; to him, it meant accepting the burden of leadership; and the moment he saw that, he felt at one with the district, with his brother-in-law who had told him his story, with Ruth in her sorrow, and, strangely, with himself . . . His own life had been wrong, or all this would not have happened. He had lived to himself and had had to learn that it could not be done . . . "Yes," he muttered to himself, "I'll go on . . . To the end . . . Whatever it may be." (FE, 264)

More acutely conscious than ever of his necessary duty to his community and to his wife, Abe seems a new man--still as firmly resolved to decisive action, but now more human and sympathetic. In the future, his action will arise from a concern for others, a desire to show the warmth and love for community and family by leading it firmly. Ed McCourt casts a shadow upon Abe Spalding's final act by saying that he "gains a victory in which neither he nor the reader can take much pleasure".<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Abe's resignation to his fate through his acceptance of weighty responsibility does not promise a pleasant future for him, but it is noble and humanitarian action---as much as any man can do for his community.

Niels Lindstedt, Grove's hero in Settlers of the Marsh, develops, like Abe Spalding, from an initial naïvete, through a trial period of blind ambition and misjudgment of values, to a final act which opens the path to self-knowledge and freedom. Niels's resolution is much more violent than Abe's--he must murder his wife--but his quiet return to Ellen is reminiscent of Abe's calm kindness to Ruth when he finally decides to fulfill his duty to her and the community. Niels, more particularly, finds the meaning for existence in Ellen's love, and the promise of marriage and children.

Whereas Niels, like Abe and Chris Rowe, finds the love and warmth which frees him in the north---at least north

of the city in the lake district of northern Manitoba--the north which he initially confronts in the Marsh is barren, cold and unfriendly. At the beginning of Settlers of the Marsh, as Niels and Nelson move farther north, a blinding snow-storm confronts them and batters them with its cruel power. They lose not only their sense of direction, but also the facility to communicate:

Both would have liked to talk, to tell and to listen to stories of danger, of being lost, of hairbreadth escapes: the influence of the prairie snowstorm made itself felt. But whenever one of them spoke, the wind snatched his word from his lips and threw it aloft.<sup>18</sup>

The nature facing Niels, like Abe Spalding's prairie, taunts him into a struggle in which he must engage with his greatest strength.

Ambitious to build a great farm, Niels is different from his counterpart in Fruits of the Earth in that his passion to work is motivated by a pure love for a girl, Ellen Amundsen: "Everything he did he did for her" (SM, 49). Ellen is deeply trapped in her own emotional wilderness, however, and she cannot allow herself any intimate involvement with a man. Driven to a suspicious hatred of sexuality by the inhuman cruelty of her parents' physical relationship, Ellen is emotionally unable to enter marriage and must reject Niels's proposal.

His dreams of love shattered, Niels retreats into a solitary life on his farm, a life where neither women nor men hold importance for him (SM, 119). In his painful self-

imposed isolation Niels turns on himself and constantly experiences "a feeling of fear: the fear of life" (SM, 60) and a horrifying sense of the inevitability which confronts every man:

the apparent futility of all endeavour was almost more than he could bear. Amundsen's impeccability in life, his trivial vanity, his slow deliberation and accuracy: where had all these taken him? To our common goal, the grave. (SM, 64)

Niels's fear becomes the essence of his life because he has no other vital meaning for which to live. His farm, which he strove to build for Ellen, becomes after her rejection an end in itself. His motivation for creation becomes perverted rather than selfless, and he loses contact with the innocence and warmth of his humanity: "Life was useless; there was no meaning in it . . . no justification . . . Niels became more and more prosperous. But the farm owned him; not he the farm....It grew according to laws of its own" (SM, 116). Niels turns to arduous work for meaning in his life, but the activity, with the absence of other human beings for whom he can perform his chores, becomes physically and psychologically detrimental to him. Like Abe Spalding, his vision becomes distorted through an excess of purposeless work.

Grove also uses the movement of the seasons to connote the deadening repetition which plagues Niels's spirit. Enmeshed in the only meaning in his life--work--the passing of time becomes significant for Niels only as a

measure for the completion or beginning of particular phases of farm labour. Grove expresses this significance of time effectively through the brief factual phrases which mark Niels's life coldly and inevitably, much as a clock mechanically ticks off seconds:

Winter went by; the thaw-up came. Breaking and seeding, on a share of the crop....

The "working-out," in the south. A year since he had come to this country....A winter in town, to learn English....Another summer. A second winter with Nelson....

Many things happened. Mrs. Amundsen died.

. . . . .

Niels cleared his land....

Spring came.

He enlarged his stable and built a chicken house. He sold hay....

Then breaking and seeding, with propitious weather towards the end of April. He had eighteen acres in crop, six of wheat, four of oats, and the rest in barley. (SM, 46; 82)

Niels's devotion to his farm is cold, unnatural and debilitating because it touches no living, feeling human being. Niels's care for the farm is, indeed, "passionate" (SM, 172), but the passion stems from a deep dissatisfaction within Niels, a wilderness of madness and confusion which demands clarity and understanding beyond his capacity. Only when his life has a vital purpose in love or simply in sympathy for others can his work become lighter.

Bobby Lund becomes caught in Niels's cycle, too, but for him the reason for living is vital and unitive, and within his grasp:

Winter went by; life went its way.

Bobby seeded his own farm, the quarter section that was to be his. He picked a

four-horse team from among Niels's colts, bargained for them with his employer, and paid in cash: he had the accumulated earnings of years. As for the farm, he would pay in half crops.

Bobby was loyal. Seeing that Niels was doing this for him, he would not leave him while he was what he was. But Bobby wanted to get married, to establish himself....

Well, even for that there would be a way pretty soon. (SM, 175)

Bobby's married life begins poorly with respect to money, but his family exudes a warmth and bond of affection which Niels has never experienced on the Canadian frontier. Bobby's liberation in marriage foreshadows Niels's own path to freedom.

As Grove uses the fundamental movement of the seasons to emphasize the essentially cyclical nature of existence, so he contrasts the city and the wilderness to point to the special relationship between these two states of life. Niels, lonely through Ellen's rejection and even more isolated by his unbelievable ignorance of the reality of sex, naïvely falls prey to Mrs. Vogel, the active representative of the city's typical lust, corruption and cosmetic superficiality. She seduces him (SM, 121), and unleashes the forces of destruction in Niels's life. Such contamination and perversion is normal for life in the cities of Grove. He sees the urban environment as a place where innocents like Niels or Frances Spalding are lured into mistakes which threaten to ruin their whole lives.

Niels's naïveté and curiosity cannot leave him

totally blameless for his fall. He is conscious of his action--he "yields" to her--and this awareness damns him even more. He realizes in an earlier visit to Minor that he is not, in any way, a city-dweller:

A feeling of general dissatisfaction possessed him. This was the first time he had spent more than a few hours in town. He had often had the same feeling before.

On his land he was master; he knew just how to act. Here in town, people did with him as they pleased . . . And the attitude of superiority everybody assumed....They were quicker at repartee--silly, stupid repartee: and they were quick at it because they did not do much else but practise it....

. . . . .  
He was impatient to get back to the farm....  
Yet he waited where he had crouched down on the bank of the little river. (SM, 89-90)

Niels returns to town, however, and in the darkness of one night, goes to Mrs. Vogel. Compelled by a naïve morality, Niels submits to her power and marries her. The fit of passion which initiates their marital relationship reflects the shallow, unsteady morality which Grove associates with the city.

Indeed, the desires of the city prove to be superficial. Niels and Clara live a life of hate, loneliness, and alternately, strained silence and bitter quarrelling, after the initial physical attraction has weakened. To rid himself of her diseased influence Niels must kill her (SM, 186-187). Niels's imprisonment for the murder is his purgatory and his mind retains a semblance of order and balance after it. When he returns to his land, the city has crept toward it inexorably, but his spirit, purged of



its evil and better for the humbling experience, seeks the purity of Ellen Amundsen. They do not enter a springtime of youthful, exuberant love, for they are middle-aged people who have suffered much in their lives. They are reborn, however, in a love which admits the pain of life while demanding the strong bond of warmth to endure it:

Niels and Ellen will endure, will try to rescue some of the joy of living, but they will never be able to erase the past. Considerably battered, a little wiser, expecting a lot less from life, they will carry on.<sup>19</sup>

Niels and Ellen go north in their love toward the place of rebirth in Grove's northern vision. Such movement is not only symbolic, but also geographical. Grove structured Settlers of the Marsh so that Ellen, Niels's hope and eventual love, lived north of him, and Mrs. Vogel, the evil which lured Niels into degeneration, lived south of him; the nearest city, likewise, as in Fruits of the Earth, was situated to the south of the hero's farm. Such a relationship between the city and wilderness not only unites each of Grove's novels through thematic consistency, but also emphasizes the idea of the pure north and the redemptive wilderness which is a significant quality of the northern novel in Canada. That Settlers of the Marsh begins in winter and ends in late spring only signifies further the ultimate hopefulness and vitality which Grove saw in Canada's north.

## III

The final trio of domestic northern novels, Wild Geese, The Viking Heart and the first two parts of Where Nests the Water Hen, differ from the other six novels under discussion in this chapter because they possess a consistent undercurrent of hope, warmth and love. In spite of the encompassing wilderness in nature and the cold inhumanity of parts of society, the vision suggested in these novels is predominantly optimistic. The novelists are not naïve in this stance--indeed, they include much sadness and resignation in their stories--but they are simply aware that the warmth of love between a man and a woman, or within a family or a community can effectively withstand the threats of non-being and loneliness in the wilderness. They see a vital justification for man's existence on earth.

The physical and psychological wildernesses of northern life in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese are barren, cruel and cold without such an assertive response. Mark, at one moment, and Judith, at another, perceive the prairie's threatening flatness and become aware of man's essential loneliness, not only in the northern land, but also in life itself.<sup>20</sup> North connotes death, particularly, for Ostenso. Whereas the Gare farm possesses the semblance of life and fertility with its flowing fields of flax, the muskeg north of the farm is a symbol of death and ultimately, the place of Caleb Gare's own destruction:

Before him glimmered the silver grey sheet of the flax--rich, beautiful, strong. All unto itself, complete, demanding everything, and in turn yielding everything--growth of the earth, the only thing on the earth worthy of respect, of homage.

North of it lay the muskeg, black and evil and potted with water-holes. (WG, 126-127)

With the opposition of the silver flax and the black muskeg, Ostenso contrasts the south and the north within the archetypal framework of light and darkness, good and evil.

Caleb Gare fittingly dies in the muskeg because, like it, he is an evil force of darkness. He is a creature who possesses the coldness of the land itself. Ostenso emphasizes that he "'is nothing but a symbol of the land'" (WG, 78), and he even walks stooped to the ground, "like a thing that belonged infinitely to the earth" (WG, 126).

Caleb is a product of his northern environment; like Watson's Mrs. Potter, he has repressed his human instinct and internalized the lonely, impersonal brutality of the north. Mark emphasizes this process of dehumanization in his explanation of his own idea of north:

"I spent some time farther north . . . The silence is awful. You feel immense things going on, invisibly. There is that eternal sky--light and darkness--the endless plains of snow--a few fir trees, maybe a hill or a frozen stream. And the human beings are like totems--figures of wood with mysterious legends upon them that you can never make out. The austerity of nature reduces the outward expression in life, simply, I think, because there is not such an abundance of natural objects for the spirit to react to. We are, after all, only the mirror of our environment. Life here at Oeland, even, may seem a negation but it's only a reflection

from so few exterior natural objects that it has the semblance of negation. These people are thrown inward upon themselves, their passions stored up, they are intensified figures of life with no outward expression--no releasing gesture."

(WG, 78)

Caleb, in his manic impersonal ambition, symbolizes the threatening cruelty of the land itself; like Fate, he broods over his family and his land, permitting occurrences which please him and stalling or perverting others which do not: "There was no outward emotion or expressed thought save that which led as a great tributary to the flow of Caleb's ambition" (WG, 75).

For the greater part of Wild Geese Caleb retains this overwhelming power and dictates to nearly all the people in his family and community. Like the land, he snatches vitality and hope from all living beings in order to satisfy his blind desire to own. His desire to possess, like Abe Spalding's, knows no bounds, but, unlike Grove's character, Caleb stains his ambition with an active perversity and malevolence which Abe never manifests. Caleb, for example, greedily manipulates a wasted Anton Klovacz in order to have a few acres of hay (WG, 190-192). He similarly "possesses" Judith and Sven, and Mark and Lind, by spying on their brief moments of love and tenderness (WG, 165; 185).

Caleb exerts his power most cruelly upon his family. He taunts Amelia with her indiscreet past (WG, 160-161) and thereby diabolically compels her to do his bidding. She

fears his vengeance, his threats about Mark, with an overwhelming hopelessness and dread. Ellen does not show the depth of fear which her mother does--indeed emotion is rare for her--but she does quietly accept her father's tyranny: "She reasoned only as Caleb taught her to reason, in terms of advantage to the land and to him" (WG, 72). Martin harbours thoughts of rebellion, but like Ellen, represses his dreams and eases back into Caleb's imprisonment (WG, 209-210). All the Gares, in fact, stand before Caleb's power, immobilized by fear, and apathetically dying under his evil:

The reeds stood up straight and brittle. It must rain soon. Lind could not bear the dry dust on the reeds. Then she suddenly realized that it was not the reeds that she was thinking of, but the Gares. (WG, 93)

Although the Gares do, ultimately, experience refreshment, they initially attempt to remedy their lives falsely and incompletely. Like Niels Lindstedt, they bury themselves in work to numb the pain of their existence:

Work did not destroy their loneliness; work was only a fog in which they moved so that they might not see the loneliness of each other.

. . . . .  
 Lind, observing the unbelievable amount of work that was done by the women in the Gare household, wondered what would happen to them if they were suddenly bereft of these endless duties. She realized that it was only occupation that kept them sane beneath the sneering vigilance of Caleb Gare. (WG, 33; 209)

Amelia, for example, takes "refuge from deeper thought" (WG,

97) in menial labour around the Gare house. Martin understands only one thing in his simple, youthful ignorance and that is work (WG, 27). Ellen, to remove the painful memories of Malcolm, decides almost immediately, in a suppression of emotion which appears to be a reflex action, to "take the clothes in when she got there, and dampen and roll them up for ironing" (WG, 198). As momentarily therapeutic as such labour acts for the Gares, it eases them into a habit of submissive escape which will only neutralize their vital humanity to a greater extent.

The title of Ostenso's novel suggests the significant connection between the geese's periodic flights north and south and the Gares' manifestation of the painful human condition. Mark comments, particularly, that "'Wild geese . . . they sound as if they know . . . something about being alone'" (WG, 49). The Gares, chained to the land by Caleb's will, exemplify in their northern life style the loneliness of the birds flying to the farthest reaches of the north. Both the birds and the Gares eventually inhabit "a region beyond human warmth . . . beyond even human isolation" (WG, 32). That the Gares remain distinct from each other and interact only through disgust, cruelty or passive subservience clearly emphasizes their lack of warmth, their unenviable achievement of the northern extremity of psychological cold and barrenness.

If the wild geese flying north inspire fear in those

few hearing their cries, the complementary movement of the seasonal rhythm, the southern flight in the fall, would symbolize hope and a meaningful future: "Far overhead in the night sky sounded the honking of the wild geese, going south now...a remote, trailing shadow...a magnificent seeking through solitude...an endless quest" (WG, 239). This witnessing of the cries of the geese seems to indicate the hearer's heightened awareness of his place in the scheme of things. Caleb, significantly, never acknowledges them; immersed in his selfish search for profit and land, he remains confined in the narrow "seasonal" vision of work and money from which Grove's Niels Lindstedt finally becomes liberated.

A man need not "go south" for self-justification and warmth in body and spirit because pockets of love do exist in the north. The couple who spearhead the attack on Caleb Gare's cold northern tyranny are, significantly, city-dwellers who bring the vitality and confidence of the "south" to the Gare land. Both Lind and Mark are clearly aliens to the wilderness ruled by Caleb, and it is they who transcend its evil and loneliness most powerfully in the end. Lind, particularly, acts as a catalyst and urges Judith to realize her dormant desires through an escape to the city with Sven. Ostenso does not emphasize Lind's direct influence on Judith, but she does hint at Lind's capacity to calm Judith's despair and give her some hope (WG, 158).

Ostenso is also careful to designate these possessors

of the "city" consciousness--Lind, Mark, Judith and Sven--as the sole figures who are able to triumph over the wilderness. All four find happiness in the city. The beneficence and creativity of Ostenso's vision of the city and community life is there captured in the birth of Judith's child. Ellen forsakes her opportunity to enter into love and the communal life--albeit with only one other person, Malcolm--and remains alone and cold in her resigned endurance.

With her inclusion of not only Ellen's stoic survival of the cold wilderness, but also other varieties of Grove's "new hopefulness",<sup>21</sup> Ostenso effectively brings together the two viable and meaningful responses to the northern environment. With this juxtaposition of the different reactions, the effectiveness of each for man in his battle with the natural, social and psychological wildernesses of existence may also be objectively judged.

The Bjarnassons, in the closeness of their family ties, represent Ostenso's reflection of the tight family unit also symbolized by Roy's Tousignants and Salverson's Lindals. The Icelanders represent a breed of people accustomed to the endless battle with an unyielding, threatening wilderness. The warmth of their life together, however, testifies to the strength of their love:

There was a weird poetry in Mathias' telling,  
a great rhythm of melancholy romance. He had  
lived much in communion with solitude, and  
had come to know that there is an  
unmeasurable Alone surrounding each soul, and  
that nameless and undreamed are the forms



that drift within that region. So that it was well for the members of a great family to cleave together and so ward off the menaces and the dreads of the great Alone. (WG, 46-47)

Ellen, too, must face "the great Alone", but she rejects any aid in her resistance. For all her brave endurance, her lonely "victory" is a bitter one. An opportunity for warmth within the cold of the north presents itself to her, but she fails to act; her tragedy is this refusal: "Perhaps it would have been delightful to have gone away with Malcolm. The northern lakes would have been deep and blue, and there would have been infinite rest beside them at night, under the stars" (WG, 216). Why Ellen behaves this way is sadly mysterious. Her only display of human feeling occurs on Malcolm's return to the Gare farm, and even at this innocent moment, she represses her natural, healthy response (WG, 136). This refusal to acknowledge her natural tendencies constitutes the drawback to her stoic endurance and the essence of her personal tragedy.

Martin's response, like Ellen's, is not an active one, but his repression stems from an innocent, child-like fear of Caleb's evil power. Martin, for most of the novel, turns to menial work to release his creative energies:

"Martin, it must be wonderful to make things--and mend them, with your hands," she ventured. Martin talked so little. He had not yet voluntarily addressed her.

"'Taint so wonderful--got to do it in any kind o' weather," he managed to say. His long, dull face became suffused: he intently inspected another shingle.

Poor Martin! At twenty he understood only one thing: work. (WG, 26-27)

He is a simple youth who seeks to harm no one. He dreams of creation in which he might selflessly build a home for his family, but he nearly always delays the assertive communication of these desires:

But Martin was a builder born, and the dream reared itself in his mind and would not down. He resolved to approach Caleb when the women were not around. He would wait until he saw what the end of summer brought. Even if the crops failed the cattle should bring something, and Caleb was keeping far too many horses in pasture now. He could well afford to build in the spring. (WG, 93)

That he at least dreams of creation is, nevertheless, a credit to Martin's humanity. When Caleb dies, Martin is free to make his own life. Liberated, he obtains plans for the new Gare home on his trip to Judith and Sven in the city (WG, 238).

Judith, moreover, in her open, natural rebellion to Caleb, achieves a freedom which Ostenso seems to exhibit as the most precious accomplishment. Unlike Ellen, who endures Caleb, and Martin, who submits to him, Judith symbolizes a vitality and depth of feeling which clearly marks her off distinctly from the rest of her family (WG, 90; 224). The passion with which she grapples with Sven exudes a physical power and life which transcends Caleb's cold, relentless cruelty:

So they wrestled. Judith was almost as tall as Sven. Her limbs were long, sinewy, her body quick and lithe as a wild-cat's. Sven, who started the tussle laughing, could

get no lasting grip on her. She slid through his arms and wound herself about his body, bringing them both to the earth . . . She threw herself upon him violently, almost somersaulting over his shoulder, freeing her arm with a terrific jerk . . . Her eyes were blazing, her breath coming in short gasps. She lashed out with her arm, striking him full across the face. While Sven, half stunned from the weight of the blow, was trying to understand the change in the issue, she hurled herself against him and he fell to the earth under her . . . They were no longer unevenly matched, different in sex. They were two stark elements, striving for mastery over each other. (WG, 85-86)

Judith, in fact, does not fear her own essential nature. She lets her passion rule her in the same elemental way in which the simple waltz music possesses her: the trance into which the music places Judith reflects the fundamental power of beautiful music over her sensitive human spirit (WG, 95). Only rarely, and with great pain, does Judith manage to suppress her nature momentarily. She finally seizes the opportunity to act, and achieves a final freedom in the decision to run to the city. There, she realizes her creative power in the conception of her child by Sven.

Whereas Judith must dramatically achieve her freedom within the bounds of Wild Geese, Lind and Mark, as members of the liberating city consciousness, always triumph over the wilderness centred in the land and the character of Caleb Gare. Their love for each other creates a warm community of two within the northern wasteland; they transcend the limiting seasons and achieve a meaning which

all other characters, except Judith and Sven, do not:

It was the honking of a belated wild goose, the last to fly over the land to the half-frozen marshes of the remoter north. Lind and Mark listened, standing still, then looked at each other. Suddenly, it seemed, the air had cleared, and the night stood over them, wide, infinite, transparent as a strange dream. (WG, 66)

Mark and Lind must come together, however, to obtain this triumph. Ellen refuses to join Malcolm, and in doing so, refuses to grasp her freedom. Caleb not only rejects other human beings, but also acts to enslave them under his ambition; his deserved fate is a total physical immersion into the land which had already claimed his spirit (WG, 237).

The important quality found in these liberating human relationships is tenderness and love. The characters in these northern novels, isolated from each other by the impinging barrenness of the wilderness, can only achieve meaning in life by coming together, by recognizing and satisfying the basic human need for love:

Lind felt humble as she heard the wild geese go over. There was an infinite cold passion in their flight, like the passion of the universe, a profound mystery never to be solved. She knew in her heart that Mark Jordan was like them---that he stood inevitably alone. But because of the human need in him, he had come to her. It warmed her to dwell on the thought. (WG, 239)

Together, Mark and Lind have hope for the future: in spite of the wilderness which can exist everywhere between people---independent of a naturally hostile environment---they constantly have each other to whom they can look for love

and self-justification.

As Mark and Lind survive through their love, and as the Bjarnassons endure the coldness of the north through the warmth of their family and heritage, so Laura Salverson's Icelanders in The Viking Heart struggle constantly against the elements and the injustices of society. The bond of love between Bjorn and Borga, the sensitivity of Balder, and the selfless sacrifices of Elizabeth and, particularly, Thor, are all valid, optimistic responses to the cold impersonal environment which permit them to achieve meaningful lives. The final vision of the novel, in spite of the many evils and painful trials, is hopeful:

we read in the comfortable assurance that everything is going to turn out all right in the end; and at the same time fall victims to the illusion of reality which Mrs. Salverson with considerable skill creates.<sup>22</sup>

The Canadian wilderness into which the author plunges her characters is, indeed, simply an extension of the threatening landscape which forced their original emigration from Iceland. The Halssons are not struck by the coldness of the Canadian north, for they are accustomed to such a climate, but by the loneliness of the desolate land. Their new land, in fact, immediately destroys the unity of their family by necessitating the departure of Borga with the Scot and his wife. The sparseness of settlement not only causes this loneliness, but also prevents frequent communication for the family across the

wide expanse of the north. Borga only learns of the death of her father and sister two years after a plague sweeps their settlement.<sup>23</sup> Wrapped physically by snow and spiritually by the repressive loneliness, northern settlers must struggle against the elements for a semblance of meaning and vitality. Only through this involvement can they break out of the "winding sheet of white silence" (VII, 54) which promises a stifling death of both body and spirit.

Loki Fjalsted, like Ostenso's Caleb Gare, enforces a cruel savagery upon his family which reflects the impersonal and sterile northern environment. Like his namesake in Norse mythology, Loki "creates" disorder and mischief, physically mistreating his crippled son (VIII, 69) and driving his wife into a lengthy madness and disorientation by his heartless malevolence. This mistreatment not only destroys any vestiges of a family unit for Loki, but also forces him, in his shame, to seek a greater isolation from his neighbours. Immersed in his work, Loki blindly retreats deeper into himself, disintegrating psychologically as he realizes more and more the extent of his inhumanity. Soul-searching so inspired by tragedy, like the self-examinations of Philip Bentley, Daniel Ainslie and Niels Lindstedt, all inevitably lead toward self-annihilation; the movement only ceases when true sympathy---or at least some act of selflessness---intrudes to light the path back out of the cramped self. Loki unfortunately pursues the destiny of his name to total

division, darkness and death.

Even Borga, seemingly protected from life's cruel element of chance by a loving husband and family, must endure a loss which nearly knocks apart the foundations of her existence. The death of Thor, by its impersonal blotting out of not only a loving son, but also a kind doctor devoted to mankind, makes Borga question the existence of God. Her own dilemma is understandable and justified, but her brief hatred of Creation darkens the lives of her family and neighbours with its self-centred grief. Only awareness of another's equally deep and valid sadness frees Borga from her sorrow and permits her to resume her life renewed. She comes to see Thor's death as necessary for the preservation of freedom. Out of Thor's death Borga realizes her part in the scheme of things, man's intimate relationship with his God:

Was that it, then? A sob caught her throat.  
 Had she been so busy working for the daily  
 bread that this other, this spiritual  
 necessity, had escaped her . . . Had he died  
 that she might find her soul? (VH, 325)

Out of Thor's physical death comes Borga's spiritual birth, and the essential optimism of Mrs. Salverson's vision of life in Canada. More aware than ever of the cyclical rhythm of life, Borga looks forward to death as a beginning, the door to a new life. The birth of Thor the Second graphically exemplifies the renewal of the cycle: as they hoped for a fulfillment and justification of themselves in Thor the

First (VH, 62), so they shall begin again to place hope in their grandson.

Salverson does not possess similar optimism for the relationship between the city and the wilderness, however, but rather presents an ambivalent attitude, oscillating from the pretentious selfishness of an urbanized Ninna to the growth and opportunity found by the Johnsons, Thor, Balder and Elizabeth in the city. Ninna, on the one hand, owns "Something of the serpent's wisdom" (VH, 186) in the coquettish manner by which she lures not only the young doctor, but also the sensitive Balder and "other poor simpletons" (VH, 205) into her service. She uses her family, like her suitors, to gratify her vanity, and such shallow self-centredness only serves to divide the once whole family. Borga speaks to her with an unaccustomed cruelty and bitterness (VH, 205), and Bjorn must promise to ask Ninna to refrain from making so many demands of her mother. Ninna's whole world revolves around titillating superficialities, however, and no words from her simple, rustic father can take her mind from her selfish pursuit of her day-to-day pleasures.

Ninna, for all her staged emotions, remains essentially heartless and "unimpassioned" (VH, 263). She understandably denies her parents the right to attend her wedding in Winnipeg. She is ashamed of their struggling life in the wilderness, oblivious, in her selfishness, of the nobility of



that incessant struggle. The pursuit of worldly possessions, what constitutes the materialistic short-sightedness of Niels Lindstedt, Abe Spalding, Chris Rowe and Caleb Gare, is Ninna's sole hope for the future. She marries to be a rich man's possession (VH, 269), having failed to experience the selflessness of true love. She is an alien to her loving parents, and her Icelandic heritage of generosity and hard work; indeed, "To the Lindals, Ninna was dead" (VH, 277).

Ninna's self-centredness preordains her fall in the city just as the honesty and sensitivity of Elizabeth, Thor, Balder and the Johnsons foreshadow their material success and happiness. The Johnsons, in their newly furnished home, attain a prosperity unknown to the Lindals, who dwell on their farm in the wilderness. Elizabeth and Thor, the former skilled in dress design and the latter born to study and to help others through medicine, both achieve their dreams in a city teeming with opportunity. Balder, possessing a peculiar receptiveness to nature and the ability to express his resultant deep feelings on the violin, receives instruction in the city which gives direction to his imagination and prepares him for a life devoted joyously to music.

Salverson's inclusion of so many promising children, stabilized in times of trouble by the unitive love of the parents, or the touching, boundless sympathy of Sjera

Bjarni, leads the novel to its inevitably hopeful conclusion. The major response to the wilderness for Mrs. Salverson, clearly, is not resignation, but rather optimism through love, creativity or the selfless service of others. Sjera Bjarni, in his kindness and wisdom, speaks for all of Mrs. Salverson's true Icelanders when he says

"it is little benefit to despair of the outcome. It is for us to struggle, to bear all the hardships as best we can in order that our children may have it easier than we. There is but one hope, one liberator for the poor. It is education."  
(VH, 110-111)

The power of the priest's selfless love for all even effectively stifles the belligerence of Loki Fjalsted. His concern for the Fjalsted family goes beyond mere performance of priestly duties, for it seems that the northern people know the necessity of caring for their neighbours; Salverson vividly emphasizes the therapeutic power of such sympathy through the startling rebirths of Anna Fjalsted, upon the death of Loki (VH, 218), and Borga, upon seeing the grief of another bereaved woman (VH, 321). Survival is contingent upon such communal awareness and reliance. The Lindals' home, for example, becomes at times of flooding "a pretty well-filled ark" (VH, 143) because of its situation on a hill. This unity of purpose is a way of life among the northern people, not just manifested during natural or family catastrophes. They have a very human reason for struggling in this new land which makes their pain and labour

worthwhile: "They were still all poor but they were working for home and children and the betterment of self" (VH, 79).

Thor also contains this innate streak of courage and generosity. Rather than immersing himself in pity when hail destroys both the wheat and his chance to go to college, he immediately realizes his mother's disappointment and runs to comfort her; his concern for her undoubtedly dispels any regrets that he may have felt at the moment. This indomitable optimism and good will is Thor's way, and it is almost fitting that he should die in the service of others. Like his namesake in Norse mythology, Thor's fate is war and thunder; the strength which he possesses is not the strength of destruction, however, but the strength of will to meet bravely the disasters of existence. Upon Thor's death, his beloved Margaret resolves to become a nun and is, thus, reborn to serve others in his memory: "'He used to say I was born to comfort people . . . I think he would like it'" (VH, 317).

Elizabeth and Balder, both of whom likewise sacrifice self-interest to serve members of their families, deservedly achieve acclaim in their respective careers. Their sensitivities to others grow, in spite of material success--Balder through his music and Elizabeth through her unrequited love for Balder. Salverson eventually draws the two children together in a scene which, however melodramatic it may be, does indicate the ideal quality of this union of

two, sensitive, loving, selfless people.<sup>24</sup> Balder and Elizabeth are youthful counterparts of Bjorn and Borga, a couple whose tenderness underlies the whole of The Viking Heart and helps to unify the author's vision of love and hope in Canada.

Gabrielle Roy's Where Nests the Water Hen is neither a fairy tale nor a romance like The Viking Heart, but the mood of its ending still affirms the value of the selfless struggle in the northern environment. The wildernesses encompassing the Tousignants are much more real than those in The Viking Heart because Roy evokes so sympathetically the pain of the conflicts and the puzzling irony of many of the resolutions. That the Tousignants, particularly Luzina, continue to seek a meaningful life in the harsh north testifies to their inherent courage in their confrontation with the incessant threat of the elements. Since this chapter concerns only the northern novel of the domestic type, the discussion of Where Nests the Water Hen will be restricted to the first two divisions of the book, with the treatment of the last section limited to a general comment upon the role of the Tousignants. The Capuchin's mission, in spite of its involvement with communities and families, is essentially an individual quest and will be discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

The scene of Roy's novel, an island in the Little Water Hen River in northern Manitoba, is, typical for a

northern novel, lonely and cold. As Luzina crosses the plains with her new baby, she describes the track which they follow

as completely frozen as the fields, as all the countryside, flat and lifeless. At times it stretched out like a congealed pond, blue and level . . . the vehicle plunged, reared up, crashed down again in a straining effort strange to behold in a landscape so broad and unfeeling.<sup>25</sup>

Luzina and her ever-increasing family do, indeed, inject vitality into their natural environment, even though it is topographically not much more than an "empty horizon" (WNWH, 16). Such an observation is part of Luzina's every-day experience, notably, because struggle is the essential fact of her life in the north:

The Tousignant dwelling, with its thick walls, its squat length, its small windows near the ground, was the first house the northwest gale encountered on its journey from the North Pole. The gale belaboured it furiously, as though there were some absolute need to make an example of this spearhead of man's encroachment. (WNWH, 93)

The physical struggle for survival is a constant concern for Luzina and her family, but the psychological threat of the land becomes more meaningful for her when she inspects the map of Manitoba. She vividly realizes the insignificance of her world:

Then Manitoba seemed to her to grow bored. So vast, so little bestrewn with names, almost entirely given over to those wide, naked stretches which represented lakes and uninhabited space! Emptier and emptier, bare paper without a printed word,

the farther you went into the North . . .  
 So vacant in that portion, the old map  
 seemed to want to take vengeance on  
 Luzina. In large letters it bore the  
 name Water Hen River. It was silent,  
 however, regarding the existence of the  
 island in the Little Water Hen. (WNWH, 90)

As Luzina's eye moves north, it becomes impressed more and more with the barrenness and loneliness of the environment. The emptiness of the map of her home startles her with the shock of her smallness, her apparent non-existence, in the larger scheme of things.

Roy, in fact, makes Luzina vividly aware of the universal rhythms of ebb and flow which encompass the human race. Luzina recognizes, through her sensitivity to the seasons, the cyclical movement of existence--the inevitable alternation of good and evil, hope and despair, and joy and sorrow. As Grove begins Settlers of the Marsh in winter and concludes it with a redemptive spring, so Roy utilizes the seasonal flights of the geese to make her heroine aware of both the beginning and the ending of the annual cycle. The geese initially fly south before Luzina in the novel, signifying the approach of winter, natural death and isolation:

Once more the ducks had started their long flight south. The wild geese also strung their way over the island, coming from even more secret retreats in the North . . . Sadly Luzina saw the coming of another torpid winter. (WNWH, 29; 30)

The coming of spring signifies liberation from this confinement, on the other hand, and the wind from the

south permits not only the release of nature from the bonds of winter, but also the uplifting of man's isolated spirit.

The geese, too, come back:

Another cold wave had been expected, but during the night Luzina spent at the settlement store a south wind had blown up. Almost warm, soft and damp, a wind swollen with hope--at any other time it would have rejoiced Luzina's heart. With this wind returned . . . the whole great aquatic tribe, exquisite companion of spring and of man's assurance throughout these faraway realms. (WNWH, 26)

Roy blurs this distinct opposition between north and south within the seasonal rhythm when she describes Luzina's mixed feelings about the arrival of the schoolteacher: at first, "civilization, progress, were blowing in this direction like the thawing spring breeze" (WNWH, 44).

Whereas Luzina's initial reaction is joyous and hopeful at the coming of the educational opportunity which will liberate her children from the north, she later views this arrival as an intrusion upon the life of her family.

Gabrielle Roy's vision of the city's expansion into the wilderness is, indeed, paradoxical, because she sees urban values as, alternately, beneficial and corruptive. Luzina reverses her view of education when she herself begins to lose as much as the children gain. She comes to see the north in her lonely disappointment as a pure, clean existence which has been "invaded [by the] refinement of the South" (WNWH, 44), and diseased by "the ancient illness with which Mademoiselle Côté had infected the house" (WNWH, 88)---

that is, ambition to achieve prosperity through education. The children, indeed, become better educated than Luzina could have imagined, but she, in the process, is bypassed: "Now she remained behind, and it was the children who were leaving. After a fashion, Luzina was seeing life. And she could not believe what her stout heart told her: already life, to which she had given so abundantly, little by little was leaving her behind" (WNWH, 87). Like the birds who fly southward to escape the winter, Luzina's children leave for the opportunities which, apparently, can only be found in the city (WNWH, 80). Luzina's power is limited by her capabilities, however, and she cannot keep her children at home: "She could no longer keep up the pace. She had more children, but at far greater intervals, and soon it seemed that that was finished. The children, however, continued to go their ways" (WNWH, 87). Luzina is left behind, fated to pursue her northern life in loneliness, incessantly writing to the children who live far away in the city (WNWH, 42).

In spite of Luzina's resignation at the departure of her children, the overall tone of the novel is optimistic. Luzina is a type of nurse, an "earth mother",<sup>26</sup> devoted to making people aware of the joys of life. Roy captures her physically as the spark of vitality in the cold north, "the temperature thirty below zero, her cheeks aflame" (WNWH, 32). Luzina is the central figure of her family, and the Little



Water Hen region, unifying them both by her love and by her creative trips to Rorketon almost every year.

The family stands alone in the wilderness, but because it is a family, their home is a protective "sheepfold" (WNWH, 43). Luzina encounters greater numbers of people in Rorketon, but the presence of her loving family--even in its isolation--is more reassuring and warm: "Nothing seemed to her warmer or more human than that lonely grey house which . . . looked out upon nothing except the quiet and monotonous Little Water Hen" (WNWH, 20). The Tousignants are, typical of the loving family in the cold north, "united in their isolation" (WNWH, 19). Roy's descriptions of the domestic scene, the most tender being Hippolyte's gathering of his children upon his rocker with him (WNWH, 30), emphasize the unitive love which effectively resists the hostile environment. The joy and warmth of the regional celebration in Part Three conclude the novel on a fitting note of communal happiness. Like Laura Salverson's Lindals, who quietly and honestly comfort each other throughout their lives, Hippolyte and Luzina glow with the happiness of carefree "renewed youth" (WNWH, 159) as they dance together. They live amid the lonely northern wilderness protected by the love which each feels for the other and for humanity.

Such warmth and love clearly constitute the only

optimistic response to the harsh environment in the domestic northern novels. Driven to shelter in a family or a community by a wilderness threatening physical and psychological non-being, northern man must turn to his neighbour, or his wife, or his child, for self-justification. The significance of the awesome wilderness for the northern novel is clear; the titles of the novels often contain physical features or seasonal qualities: Settlers of the Marsh, Where Nests the Water Hen, Fruits of the Earth, and Wild Geese. The most devastating struggles with the wilderness do not involve physical hardships, however, but the emotional, social or psychological conflicts caused by undergoing the northern experience alone. Philip Bentley, Caleb Gare, Daniel Ainslie, Theophil and Abe Spalding, all have families and friends, but they commit themselves to false goals which do not admit other human beings. Only those who develop a deeper sympathy for other men survive and pursue happy lives.

The domestic northern novel is by no means unrealistic because of its essential optimism. The novels already discussed elucidate vividly the problems of the human condition. Through the use of nature and its seasonal cycle, and the relationship between the city and the wilderness, northern novelists make their characters painfully aware of death and the impersonal---sometimes actively malevolent---qualities of existence. The novelists

simply pursue the cyclical rhythm of life around its full curve until they glimpse the beginning again. Such "hopefulness" does not make Canadian writers of the north dreamily romantic and naïve, but simply more aware, in the starkness of their physical and psychological wildernesses, of the fundamental nature of existence.

### CHAPTER THREE

Unlike the novels of Chapter Two, which focus upon the members of a community, a family, or a couple, the northern novels of the third chapter concern the struggles of individuals who seek alone the meaning of life in the north. The answers sought by the solitary figures of the five novels under discussion in the first two sections of this chapter contain loftier, more inaccessible conceptions of happiness and peace than were emphasized in the more mundane, domestic novels of the last chapter. Roy's Pierre and Grove's Len Sterner, for example, whose stories in The Hidden Mountain and The Yoke of Life will be discussed in the first section of this chapter, only achieve respite from their struggles against nature and the conflicts within themselves through the peace of death. The bequests of vitality which justify the suffering of their lives seem insignificant, however, because their influence upon other human beings is indirect and unintentional.

The novels of the second section, The Cashier, Music at the Close, and Who Has Seen the Wind, also focus upon the significance of death to man, but the central characters in these novels have the opportunity and the capacity to create, in turn, a vitality and hope in others which make death a meaningful act. Alexandre Chenevert and Neil Fraser

actually die, but they succeed in leaving warm memories of courage and love. Brian, the boy coming to awareness in Who Has Seen the Wind, experiences the pain of losing loved ones in death, but he grows from such experiences by learning to accept them as part of the impersonal cycle of existence. Brian is distinct from Alexandre and Neil, significantly, because of the naïveté of many of his childish beliefs and actions, but, in all three novels of the second section, love, life, and warmth evolve directly from experiences with the harshness of reality.

The third group of novels in the Third Chapter, Over Prairie Trails, the third part of Where Nests the Water Hen, and White Narcissus, emphasizes the optimism on the real, human level which is possible for the individual in the northern environment. It is significant in such novels that the warmth and self-justification are achieved only when the character serves or loves some other living being. Grove, for example, in the diary of his journeys, expresses love for nature and feels comfort in his waiting family. Father Joseph-Marie, Roy's Capuchin, desires to spread love to the communities in the farthest regions of the north. Richard Milne liberates a land seemingly barren with the pervasive sterility of one family,<sup>1</sup> and comes to achieve a love which he has long sought. The resolutions of the novels of the third group are closely linked, clearly, with the affirmations of community and family which are essential to

the domestic northern novel, but the emphasis still lies in all the novels of Chapter Three upon the quest of the individual for meaning in the north. The validity of the quest, however lonely it may necessarily have been, is contingent upon the unitive and reparative powers which the struggle intentionally releases.

# I

The Yoke of Life and The Hidden Mountain must necessarily conclude with the deaths of the protagonists. Gabrielle Roy's artist, Pierre, achieves such a precise vision of the essence of life in his mountain that he must die before capturing it on canvas. Pierre rightfully pictures himself in his self-portrait as a type of "primitive divinity",<sup>2</sup> but such pretensions cannot be fulfilled wholly without death. To create such an essential and meaningful expression of life, as Pierre hopes to do, is not an accomplishment available to man or God-made-man--for even Christ had to die to complete his mission. To approach godhead, as Pierre does in the final pages of The Hidden Mountain, and to persist in trying to encompass it, is sacrilegious and dooms the offender to death. Man cannot suffer the presence of pure divinity for more than a brief time, and live to describe it.

Grove's Sterner, chained within himself by an imagination which refuses to admit hard truth and reality,

succumbs to life's incessant threats and pain, and escapes through suicide. Such a decision seems ignoble and selfish when compared with the arduous struggles waged by Abe Spalding and Niels Lindstedt, but death is really Len's only path to freedom. Grove emphasizes, clearly, in the passages describing the suicide, that Len and Lydia achieve a security and peace in death's oblivion which life never offered to them.

The setting for The Yoke of Life is the lake district of northern Manitoba, a scene which, typical for a northern novel, is a wilderness which threatens man both physically and psychologically. Kolm, Len Sterner's step-father, bluntly and accurately states that "'This wilderness . . . eats us up'".<sup>3</sup> Kolm's observation is almost prophetic, because the elements become his destructive and merciless enemy. Initially, a winter landscape, "ice-cold, windswept, and hostile" (YL, 26), stark beneath "the indifference of the sun" (YL, 26), is inhuman and threatening in its mere existence. Man feels a deep fear through merely living in the north.

Nature becomes much more like a malevolent force in The Yoke of Life, furthermore, when it endangers the farmers' livelihood on the land. In a scene recalling the storm in Salverson's The Viking Heart, hail crushes animals, crops and homes in a sudden storm (YL, 59-60). The flood in the slough, similarly, which drowns Kolm's horses or leaves them



to be easy game for the wolves (YL, 197-203), makes the farmer sensitive to the futility of struggling against the overpowering, incessant elements.

Len feels at the lumber camp, too, that the forest at night appears "like a towering scaffold" (YL, 97). Grove's nature in The Yoke of Life inspires fear like Watson's Coyote, threatening man with physical death and spiritual non-being. Man is constantly unsure of his life while inhabiting the northern environment. Len's advice to Lydia that she should "'Get used to the presence of death'" (YL, 309) is significant counsel for the northern settler. Such uncertainty, well founded on the sudden, random eruptions of snow, hail, or water, is the essence of the northern consciousness. A settler living alone, without the comfort of another living being--whether it be human or animal--to justify his solitary existence, is eventually overcome by this tension and dread. The constant suppression of feelings in the face of such an awesome landscape forces the settler deeper into himself, gradually removing any sense of real, warm, selfless humanitarianism.<sup>4</sup> He becomes "bushed",<sup>5</sup> unable to see or feel the vitality and love which could liberate him from his deep-seated fear. His only vision of escape and peace becomes, as for Len Sterner, the darkness of death.

The threats of the landscape, if not adequately resisted by a unitive action among members of a community or

a family, also prove detrimental to man's spirit. The sterility of the farmers' marriages, reflected vividly in the wives' frequent miscarriages,<sup>6</sup> is a direct result of the struggle to survive in the northern environment. Driven to help their husbands in the fields, and to satiate their passions in bed, women such as Len's mother become trapped in an endless cycle of fatigue, pregnancy and miscarriage; if a child happens to survive the gestation period, it might, nevertheless, because of inherited weakness, die shortly after being born (YL, 149). Such recurrent tragedies fill marriages like the Kolms' with tension and bitterness. Mrs. Kolm often ignores her husband (YL, 19); the husband, in turn, rules the family strictly, often threatening his wife with an authority which echoes the tyranny of Ostenso's Caleb Gare (YL, 24).

The effect of the north upon Len is more subtle than the tension between his parents, but it is still far-reaching in its power. In spite of longings for union with another being (YL, 67), Len finds pleasure in solitary communions with nature, "undisturbed by any human presence" (YL, 65). Forced deeper and deeper into himself while in his innocent adolescence, Len gradually places more faith in his imagination than in everyday reality. He mistakes a deer for the imaginary unicorn, but soon "the rational explanation of what he had seen fell away; the vision itself remained" (YL, 70). Len shortly thinks, when he sees Lydia, that

"Reality excelled all visions" (YL, 73), but such a statement is self-deluding. Len's reality comes to evolve from his own dreamy imagination, and the resultant importance of his own beliefs eventually denies him, in his innocent, self-centred loneliness, any capacity for warm contact with other human beings.

Len initially distinguishes the Lydia of his idealistic imagination from the Lydia who becomes progressively more materialistic and coquettish in her letters (YL, 133-138), but he gradually falls prey to his own misguided thoughts. He acknowledges the ever-widening gap which Lydia is placing between them, but demands, nevertheless, their ultimate union: "They were equinascent, of equal rights and equal worth; and whether she saw it or not, they fitted together" (YL, 166). Len turns to esoteric philosophies in his contemplation of Lydia because he cannot accept wholly the reality of her shallow character. His imagination offers a suitable, comfortable surrogate:

At last he sought refuge in an artifice. He saw Lydia etherealised, de-carnalised; she was Miranda; she might have been his redemptress. He pictured her as she had looked when Dick Jackson was speaking to her. She had held back; she had shown the man that contempt which Len should have shown him . . . In order to justify his condemnation of the world, he needed to idealise her . . . She must be enshrined so that she might save him . . . The spirit in him needed reincarnation and found it in a fiction of her. (YL, 178)

Len permits his life to be determined by his imagination.

Lydia is no longer a real person, but rather a distorted creation of Len's mind. Such "concern" for another is not sympathy or love, but selfish, neurotic manipulation of reality.

Imprisoned by his imagination so completely, Len eventually becomes obsessed with his ideal vision of Lydia, and wildly stalks the streets of the city in search of her. He finally locates her, but for the first time, he cannot deny the distance between his imaginings and her objective reality: "between them stood something which was enormous as the night" (YL, 304). Grove's image is significant, because young Len's constant loneliness in the awesome northern environment may well have been the cause of his increasingly deep penetration of his imagination. He has denied the pain of reality so often that the stark confrontation with Lydia the prostitute impresses him deeply with the futility of living in a world totally alienated from his dreams. Peace may only come with death.

The manner in which Grove structures his novel emphasizes the inevitability of Len Sterner's fate. The four stages of Len's life, "Boyhood", "Youth", "Manhood", and "Death", emphasize the cyclical rhythm of existence of which northern novelists seem very conscious. Grove indicates that, even with the death of Len Sterner, life is reborn in his namesake, Charlie's son. The continuity of the cycle in this way only reflects the fateful, impersonal

forces which grip man, however, because Len gives nothing to his namesake but his name. He dies with Lydia, but his quest is selfish, to ensure his peace of mind. He leaves no memory of vitality and hope to encourage young Len, only a warning not to follow his very dark path of loneliness.

Grove typically formulates a rigid opposition between the city and the wilderness which also reflects the presence of larger patterns governing man's existence. Lydia is initially as flirtatious as any young woman, but after exposure to the superficiality of "the abyss" (YL, 217) of the city, she undergoes a slow but irrevocable degeneration in morality. She engages in "the great game of flirtation" (YL, 170) not only with Dick Jackson, but also with Len and the other boys. She cruelly uses them, much as Salverson's Ninna uses her suitors, to satisfy her self-love. She becomes so enmeshed in the cold materialism of the city that she even turns her physical beauty into a financial asset in her prostitution. Len, on the other hand, with his delicate imagination, has difficulty integrating his rural sensitivities to the urban environment and feels an alien even in city clothes (YL, 150).

Grove broadens the contrast between the city and the wilderness by practically equating the city with "south" and the wilderness with "north". The path north, the road which Len initially follows with the cows to go home (YL, 13), and which Len and Lydia traverse to find the peaceful cessation

to their life-long struggles, is the way to "salvation", or at least, safety, warmth and happiness. South, on the other hand, connotes imprisonment and perversion. Len's first sight when he comes to the city, in fact, is the prison (YL, 226). This scene emphasizes, as it also does for Gabrielle Roy's cashier, Alexandre Chenevert,<sup>7</sup> the retardation of growth which the impersonal city environment seems to impose upon the human consciousness. Lydia's flight to the south with Dick Jackson foreshadows her downfall, too, through the death and pain which she leaves in her wake (YL, 194).

Len must go north, clearly, to discover some semblance of meaning in his life. He has experienced moments of comfort and warmth within the company of his family (YL, 15; 77), but his destiny is to struggle alone with his fate. Urged by Mr. Crawford to pursue academic studies diligently with the admonition, "'Never [to] give up'" (YL, 218), Len initially strives unceasingly to fulfill his life through education. His solitary studies only serve, however, to intensify the alienating effects of his overactive imagination.

Len eventually receives from Lydia a love and tenderness which sustains him through his period of fever in the city. He and Lydia actually seem to find comfort and safety in each other's company as they go north on the lakes, but the bond between them lacks the reparative power to heal the sickness which grips Len's spirit. He has

immersed himself too deeply in his imaginary world. He is unable to acknowledge fully the unitive power of love in order to benefit from it, and consequently, the brief moment of hope which flashes through his mind (YL, 324) is quickly supplanted by a resolution to seek death.

The tragedy of Len's suicide, in spite of Lydia's accompaniment, is still "private".<sup>8</sup> Len has, for a long time, been subservient to "'the spectre of the past'" (YL, 348) through his cramped imagination, the haven to which the stark external wilderness had driven him, in his youth, for comfort and warmth. Lydia cannot free him with her love because he has gone beyond human sympathy. Life offers no justification for his struggles and the only peace which he can envisage is the darkness and oblivion of death. By committing suicide, Len does submit, notably, to the power of Sheila Watson's Coyote, who promises "forgetting [and] rest" (DH, 29), but for a man so desperately lost in the wilderness of his own mind, such an escape constitutes the only path to freedom.

As Len Sterner returns for release to the northern environment which originally determined his susceptibility to life's struggles, so Gabrielle Roy's artist, Pierre Cadourai, finds unique inspiration for his artistic impulses amid the despair and physical discomfort of northern life. The north threatens to destroy Pierre's "inner vitality",<sup>9</sup> but his drive to capture his essential imaginative vision in

art effectively resists the repressive environment which immobilized Len Sterner's consciousness.

Pierre's goal is the liberation of the spark of divinity which lies deeply in man, and the subsequent union of this essence with its external correlative in nature--what Pierre finds in his mountain; his art will solidify the bond if his imagination can hold the vision. Proximity to the moment of this apocalyptic union is fatal, however, as Pierre discovers, and he dies with the belief that he has failed in his quest. His life, from his point of view, has accomplished nothing.

Before his imaginative struggles, Pierre must first succeed in enduring the physical aspects of the environment. Confronted with the lonely expanses of Ungava (HM, 94), Pierre recognizes the hostility of his own mountain; it seems to ask, "'Who is this fool who dares think that I might, perchance, be indulgent?'" (HM, 94) Pierre must match the impersonality of nature, and kill an old caribou, clumsily and mercilessly, in order to survive. Through such coldness and cruelty, the north impresses itself upon Pierre's sensitive imagination and sets him apart, like Len Sterner, from the company of other men. The north becomes part of Pierre's creative faculties, and he becomes aware of its beauty as well as its tyranny. He can only release his artistic impulses when he is encompassed by the northern spirit. Even when he lives in Paris, he only feels peace



when he is reminded of his northern home (HM, 155; 162). The north touches his paintings in France, too, uniquely creating "a Paris shivering under an Arctic glow, with shortened trees, with heavy human shapes entangled in masses of clothing" (HM, 149).

Pierre is clearly imprisoned by the north in his artistic expression as much as Len Sterner is retarded emotionally; he is denied the capacity to paint meaningfully without including some minute recollection of the northern environment--snow, sparse vegetation, or the impression of nature's harshness and impersonality. Pierre, like Len, must seek alone his vision of life because his quest demands all his energy and feelings:

He felt touched. He was sorely tempted to open his arms to this wandering creature. Yet the chill desert lands, the skies still undisclosed, also held his heart as though pledged in love, and in a love that possessed him more than any other. (HM, 27)

Pierre sadly acknowledges the paradox of his quest, that he must sacrifice the warmth of love and community living in order to seek, for all men to share, the essence of life (HM, 41; 62; 64). He bravely continues his treks across the Canadian north, and across the sea to Paris, painfully aware "that of all men he was the most alone" (HM, 28).

Pierre's essential wilderness is the obsession, the "besetting feverishness" (HM, 18), the "disease" (HM, 28), which makes him wander in search of his mountain of revelation. Driven by a desire to capture his significant

vision of the north in art, Pierre is even more importantly the servant of his own imagination. He speaks at one point "as if he were his own beast of burden, his own slave" (HM, 76). His description of the caribou episode to Stanislas curiously merges the animal and the man in his narrative, as if the hunter and the hunted, "the pursued and the pursuer" (HM, 168) constituted but one being. Even more obviously than Ross's Philip Bentley, Pierre's tragedy is himself, his own imaginative quest.

Pierre, consequently, undergoes excruciating physical and mental torture when he creates, because his goal lies deeply entrenched in the unexplored regions of his soul. To release his vision, he must suffer. Orok glimpses Pierre in the thralls of his "creative" pain (HM, 87), and Roy once depicts him as a man who "looked much more like someone who had been mountain climbing than a man whose goal lay ready at hand within him" (HM, 164-165). The latter part of the statement belies the difficulty of Pierre's struggle against his imaginative wilderness, but Roy immediately ennobles his pain through his self-portrait:

As from a face on a slant, a face  
disproportionately long, the eyes looked  
down from a level of their own. On top of  
the head there was a hint of curious  
protuberances, a suggestion of antlers,  
perhaps . . . Yet the pupils, though  
somewhat dilated, were certainly those of a  
man, and they expressed an unbearable  
lucidity and sadness . . . What then, had  
Pierre tried to suggest? What close  
alliance of the soul to all that is primitive?  
Or was this not that high-pitched lament in

which are commingled the anguish of killing and of being killed? The portrait drew you as though into some unfrequented area of the consciousness . . . Its appeal lay in that kind of fascination with which it pointed--counter to all clarity---toward the harrowing enigmas of existence. (HM, 177-178)

In this portrait lies not only the combined torturer-victim theme, but also the vision of Pierre as the suffering Christ with his crown of thorns. Pierre seems to grasp the sadness of the doomed Christ, perplexed yet grimly reconciled to the fact that he must die in order to fulfill his creative function. Christ dies, however, to permit the rebirth of sinful man; Pierre must die, significantly, because his mere humanity, courageous and persistent though it may be, will not permit the completion of the quest which he is compelled to continue. Pierre's imagination drives him forward to his mountain, but it is precisely the power which his imagination unleashes which will, at the same time, necessitate his destruction.

Pierre's death abbreviates his quest and renders it, with respect to the vision of the mountain, essentially nonproductive. His vision dies with him, and Roy questions the validity of his accomplishments if no man may directly benefit from them. Roy initially makes Pierre very aware of the mysterious link between life and death (HM, 32), but she seems to remove the possibility of any redemptive vitality arising from his death because he dies so bound up with his own failure. Like Len Sterner, the necessity of loneliness

in his struggles also damns his final attempts to achieve meaning.

Roy does elucidate the cyclical movement involving life and death by emphasizing, in the manner of Grove, the contrast between the evil city and the good wilderness. Roy is not concerned with moral issues, however, but rather with the effects of the urban environment upon the creative imagination bred in the north. Father Le Bonniec urges Pierre, for example, to paint with northern freshness and clarity for the "'prisoner of the cities'" (HM, 142) who has bypassed "'the great cries of the heart'" (HM, 111). The priest accurately sees Pierre in the role of a teacher who will awaken, through art, the confined feelings of city dwellers. Pierre must first achieve formal training in a Parisian school, however, and such an environment tends to stifle Pierre's talents:

the sadness of soul that cities conveyed to him wound itself around him. Here the monster was full-grown. Through the small window entered flashes of neon, the glare of illuminated billboards, and a ceaseless, dreadful uproar. (HM, 125-126)

In spite of the setting, Pierre persists in his struggles to realize a meaningful expression of his mountain. He only really attains freedom from the city consciousness, in fact, when he becomes lost in the spirit of the north in his imagination and is reborn (HM, 131; 139).

Such is Pierre's fate that the north, the geographical place or "the way of thought",<sup>10</sup> is the sole

power through which his artistic impulses find release. Pierre senses correctly that the northern landscape itself, "strange and cold in all its splendor" (HM, 18), contains the goal of his quest for meaning. He even finds mirrors of paradise in the northern regions of Canada at moments when nature impresses its essential vitality upon his imagination (HM, 18-19; 42-43). The hidden mountain actually becomes his ultimate vision of life, his heaven on earth: "Before him towered a high and solitary mountain that glowed in the red sunlight and burned like a great pillar of fire" (HM, 81). Pierre fittingly kneels before it because, like Moses's burning bush, this mountain is a manifestation of the universal power, the essence which Pierre has been seeking.

Like Moses, too, Pierre has the potential to unite men through the revelation of the central mystery of human existence. Pierre realizes the reparative power which such a vision would possess because he himself is momentarily reborn through the sight of the mountain: "At the mountain's foot, Pierre forgot, as he looked up at it, all the hunger, the weariness, the barriers, the loneliness, the cruel anguish" (HM, 83). Such is the healing power which the north can exert upon Pierre's tortured spirit, and which he, in turn, wishes to give to others in his art (HM, 119; 139).

Pierre acknowledges his duty to humanity: he knows that in his art he protests, with creation and vitality, the pain and suffering of the human condition (HM, 108; 124).

He struggles incessantly with his imaginative conception of his mountain, because it is this vision in his soul which he wishes to liberate for all men:

But, thought Pierre, whenever he himself set himself free, did he not, by that very fact, also set other men free, set free their imprisoned thought, their suffering spirit?  
(HM, 92)

Christ-like, Pierre accepts his cross and continues his quest. His desire to recreate his mountain leads him irrevocably toward his Calvary, the place of final confrontation with the divine vision within him.

He dreams of such total revelation, where he will experience "the whole object, the whole subject" (HM, 85)--- in other words, the essence and truth of man and his creation---but he is incapable, in the overwhelming energy of his search, of realizing the necessary death which also awaits him. He sees himself as Christ-like in his self-portrait, a victim, yet he is not aware of the danger of the identification. His final, fatal attempt to capture the mountain vision (HM, 184-186) is his moment of truth, and Pierre, in his excitement, accepts the self-challenge to capture it in art. He follows the vision too intently, however, and unlike Keats, who drew back from his nightingale's headlong flight toward death, Pierre is overcome by the divine presence which has risen from within to encompass him.

Pierre's quest can be seen, therefore, as a triumph

of necessity. He achieves his "human limit",<sup>11</sup> and his attempt to transcend that barrier results in his destruction. He feels, in the final moments of searing pain, that the inevitable loss of his mountain to other men constitutes the frustration of his whole life's work. As alone as he must necessarily have been in the north in his quest for the one vision, Pierre does not recognize any release of unitive power from his work.

Pierre's loneliness damns him, clearly, because in his obsession with the hidden mountain, he is unaware of the many moments of deep feeling which he has given to the world in his other sketches and paintings--what he would consider his imperfect "failures". Father Le Bonniec is overcome by his sketches of the north, but Pierre's response to the priest's joy is hesitant, and almost fearful of the exposure of his art to the world's eye: "he was not ready, would not be ready for a long while, it seemed to him, for this ordeal of confrontation that appalled him" (HM, 112). Pierre considers his work incomplete, oblivious, as he is, of the life which his simple drawings generate. Only aware of his personal sense of failure to achieve happiness through the completion of his singular quest, Pierre blandly bequeaths his life's work to his few friends (HM, 180-181). The lack of concern in such a generous giving of life and warmth detracts from the justification which the bequests would otherwise give his death. Pierre does not realize the

expressions of freedom and deep feeling which he has created, and such naïveté necessitates the irony of his final lonely death.

The Hidden Mountain, as a northern novel, is important not only for the incessant victimization of the protagonist, however, but also for the incessant struggle which Pierre wages with the north. Pierre admits the easeful peace of death only twice (HM, 39; 101), and his constant concern is for the creation of spiritual life and warmth amid the cold, threatening north. The courage and unyielding will with which he meets his many physical and imaginative trials are integral qualities of the vital, hopeful response to the north which Roy advocates.

## II

The vitality released by Pierre Cadrai's death is unintentional, a justification outside the bounds of the failure with which he has circumscribed his life and death; he believes that his death is meaningless, and only Roy adds the significant courage of which the reader, and not Pierre, is fully aware. The novels of the second section, The Cashier, Music at the Close, and Who Has Seen the Wind, emphasize, on the other hand, the life, hope and awareness which can arise directly and purposefully for the novels' characters from an experience of the pain and inevitability of the human situation. Alexandre, Neil and Brian must



necessarily feel death and despair, in fact, either personally or vicariously, to realize the importance of life.

Alexandre Chenevert is very aware of the need for a united struggle against the human condition, but only because he has contracted a fatal disease. Trapped within a wilderness determined by the limitations of his own mind and the cold, dehumanizing city of Montreal, Alexandre must actually confront death in order to free himself. His quest for meaning leads him north to Lac Vert, beyond the sterile confines of the city, only to reveal to him that regeneration must occur ultimately in his spirit to be effective and valid. Alexandre's journey to the redemptive north must be psychic as well as geographical.

Gabrielle Roy does emphasize the necessity of her cashier's spiritual quest, but the two wildernesses into which she thrusts him, the urban environment and the personal despair of failure and inadequacy, are inextricably linked: "His tragedy is that he has not entirely become a robot. Hypersensitive, vulnerable, he suffers from all the indignities of a mechanized civilization".<sup>12</sup> The city seizes upon Alexandre's uneasy loneliness and intensifies it, driving him deeper into his own worry and tension. His final freedom rises from his renewed sense of community, but his struggle to complete the quest is fought alone in the depths of his own tortured spirit.

Alexandre's initial wilderness is the prison of his

own beliefs and thoughts. He is "a stranger to himself and even an enemy" (Cash, 53), caught as he is in his self-centred vision of the world and other people. He makes no attempts to establish contact with the surrounding community, and resides in a state of tense detachment, waiting for action (Cash, 54) like the characters in The Double Hook. Alexandre possesses neither the courage nor the insight of a James Potter, and he denies the validity of humanitarian action which solidly unites people through love. In his ignorance of human relationships, Alexandre even believes that feelings such as happiness adhere to predictable, scientific structures in their release and intensity (Cash, 60; 109).

His loneliness both feeds such cold visions of man and grows itself by the isolation urged by such a dehumanization of man's feelings. He believes, in spite of his apparent lack of feeling, that he is responsible for the suffering of humanity and should feel sympathy for it.

Doctor Hudon warns him:

"You think too much. You let things weigh too much on your mind . . . Do you think you're obliged to carry the world on your shoulders?"

So stated, the question obviously broke through his defences.

"No."

"After all, it's not your world."

"Not mine, altogether, no . . ." Alexandre assented, though still clinging to a mental reservation. (Cash, 105)

Alexandre's sympathy is Christ-like in its universality, but

it lacks the warmth of a saviour's love. He possesses "the secret depth of the soul" (Cash, 27), the capacity to love intensely; his wilderness is his inability to direct the feeling so that it touches and enlivens another human being. Alexandre's problem with his sympathies is comparable to the artist's distinction between the imagination of a work and the actual creation of that idea. Like Pierre Cadrai, he is initially unable to express his inner self in an objective way; the cashier knows only failure and frustration in his attempts to communicate verbally with other men (Cash, 26-27; 145).

Even when Alexandre bridges the "abyss" (Cash, 147) between thought and word, his capacity for love is spent superficially on people with whom warm human contact is virtually impossible. He admits, in a moment of personal insight, that "Without the dead, the absent, the folk you had never even seen, whatever would become of man's faculty for love" (Cash, 23). Alexandre, indeed, tends to sympathize for not only the deceased--he only loves his mother now that she is dead (Cash, 34)--but also the diseased--"For no disease or infirmity could leave him cold" (Cash, 45). Such "love" permits Alexandre to remain aloof yet satisfied, in a self-deluding way, that he has fulfilled his duty to humanity.

The cashier takes his place within his family with a similar lack of true feeling. He expresses love, for

example, through anxiety; his bursts of anger and worry to Eugénie (Cash, 73-74; 177) and his daughter (Cash, 93) reflect his inability to love honestly, with warmth and tenderness. He furthermore demands silence rather than meaningful dialogue to sort the confusion of his marriage (Cash, 75). Such denial of communication emphasizes the divisive power of Alexandre's essential loneliness. When Eugénie tactlessly comments upon his return from Lac Vert, Alexandre again retreats into a quiescent shell of self-pity instead of challenging her cold remarks with his warm and moving letter.

Alexandre need not have composed the letter, notably, had he been capable of expressing his joy orally to Eugénie. He typically seeks to distribute life in the second-hand way in which he receives it--through media. He initially laments his mistrust of the media's reporting (Cash, 24), but proceeds to rely wholly upon the newspapers and the radio for his news information (Cash, 25; 46-47; 85). Alexandre's reliance upon the media is a necessity in the rapid style of modern life, and his simultaneous mistrust of it is not an uncommon worry. His problem is the intensity with which he assimilates the news. Admittedly more attracted to objects spatially or temporally distant from him, the media feeds this perverse concern and only widens the abyss between Alexandre and other men.

Alexandre's problem with his sympathies arises

partially, no doubt, from his urban environment. He is bombarded by cold, brutally commercial advertisements on his return from the north (Cash, 154-155), and on his final taxi ride to the hospital (Cash, 173-174). In both circumstances the city encompasses Alexandre with its chilling impersonality, its emphasis upon non-human, one-way communication. Conditioned to receive but not to give, Alexandre is undoubtedly one of many who live alone among the masses of people: "His greatest need is to feel, to be able to live a natural emotional life".<sup>13</sup> Such a need is difficult to fulfill within an environment shaped by individuals madly pursuing wealth on isolated, parallel paths.

Natural human sympathy and the most harmless expressions of affection are also nonexistent in Alexandre's job. The bank emphasizes the wilderness of the cashier's life, in fact, because it seems to be the locus of the most damaging aspects of the urban environment. Alexandre is physically confined in "his own cage" (Cash, 31), separated from both the public and his fellow workers. His job is monotonous and devitalizing, filling Alexandre at one moment with the overwhelming dread of the absolute insignificance of his own being:

And from this very vantage point, just as he was starting his thirtieth roll, Alexandre beheld eternity. He found himself facing incommensurable time, stretching into the invisible. The impression of this vastness suddenly

overwhelmed the teller like a lowering threat. (Cash, 32)

Alexandre is alone in his teller's cage, and his loneliness intensifies his despair. He cannot turn to a fellow worker for support, or even a smile, because personal feelings only appear predictably as "A few absent-minded good mornings" (Cash, 31), or else not at all (Cash, 38; 170). Alexandre himself feels likewise compelled to contain his feelings, that he should "not let himself act like a human being" (Cash, 39). He can only expect the majority of his customers, themselves city-dwellers, to respond to his coldness with an equal disinterest (Cash, 39).

Doctor Hudon experiences the struggle with apathy much more than does Alexandre because his consistent confrontation with suffering humanity practically demands his detachment in order for him to survive. He cannot really permit himself to indulge in the sympathetic imaginings which often hold Alexandre, yet the doctor's concern for the cashier (Cash, 106) suggests that he is very much a true physician. His love of life and man necessitates his deep involvement with his patients in a very real and personal way. Hudon's intimate concern also emphasizes, by contrast, the cold detachment of Alexandre's affections: "As long as suffering existed, would it ever allow him a personal life?" (Cash, 104) The doctor laments his incessant, necessary struggle against the inevitability of decay and death, the very meaningful fight in which Alexandre must engage. Only

by becoming personally involved, and repelling the urban tendency to dehumanization and isolation, will Alexandre achieve some self-justification in his life.

Roy's city in The Cashier becomes the arena for man's struggles with existence and it is precisely that environment in which the impersonality and sterile mechanism of life are most evident. The wilderness for Roy is urban in her modern novel, and the regeneration of man's spirit can occur only in the redemptive north. The city is a hellish environment, furthermore, threatening particularly those who would assert warmth, love and vitality because the energy required for action there must be great. Hudon, for example, is a regular combatant with the human condition and the struggle is slowly destroying his body and his spirit:

Stern, often exasperated, his face was nevertheless sympathetic, with its brown, attentive eyes, so filled with weariness. Tiny wrinkles which crowded his temples seemed to stretch those eyes, as though Dr. Hudon were continuously facing a tiring problem. (Cash, 100)

Hudon seemingly grants himself momentary respites from his torturous sympathies by his lapses into routine detachment because it is only through such intervals of peace that he will survive.

Roy might consider such instances of renewal "northern", in the same way that Alexandre's journey to Lac Vert momentarily permits him the transient happiness which life offers. Roy initially distinguishes between the city

and the wilderness, the hell of Montreal and the peaceful natural paradise of the north. Alexandre's bus ride south is significant in the clarification of the contrast because he experiences the subtle urbanization of the land. He notices, as he leaves the north, the fences which straighten and confine nature's curves (Cash, 152), the penitentiary which warns of the city's imprisonment (Cash, 152), man's increased use of metals which gleam in the sun (Cash, 152-153), a poor substitute for the clarity of shining Lac Vert, and finally, the aforementioned multitude of advertisements, blaring loudspeakers and newspapers (Cash, 154-155).

Alexandre becomes lost once again amid the impersonality of the city, and he comes to experience a loneliness and sense of alienation (Cash, 169) which goes beyond his former despair.

Alexandre has not really changed at all because of his trip to the north, as Eugénie bluntly informs him. His northern "rebirth" in the wilderness is effective for but one day in Montreal, and then his optimism for man fades quickly. Alexandre has glimpsed the happiness which life can hold, however, and his awareness will eventually lead him to his salvation. He returns to the city from Lac Vert after growing bored with Le Gardeur's life of subsistence, realizing that his spirit will not change merely with a change in environment; he seems dissatisfied everywhere. Only a confrontation with the most devastating wilderness of



man's psyche, the admission of death's inevitability, will release him to love his fellow man warmly and selflessly.

Like the other protagonists in the novels of the first two sections of this chapter, Alexandre is essentially alone in his quest for meaning, and none of the times when he does receive sincere warmth and affection deters him from his lonely journey. Alexandre is "tense in his desire for companionship" (Cash, 45), and moments of potential interaction either overwhelm him or surprise him so that he retreats defensively into his loneliness. He mumbles self-consciously, unable to express his deep gratitude to the kindly old man in the queue (Cash, 40), and also feels compelled to hide the joy which the doctor's advice has given to him (Cash, 108). He recoils, similarly, from the contented love which binds Les Gardeurs together in the wilderness (Cash, 139-141). Alexandre may seem insensitive and eccentric because he "rejects" all offers of affection, but his problem lies disastrously deep in his own mind. He must remain essentially alone in his life, like Pierre Cadrai and Len Sterner, and must ultimately confront death alone, too. Alexandre seizes upon warmth in his illness, however, and rediscovers a northern vitality which justifies the intense pain of his struggles and his death.

In its clarity, peace and almost sacred loneliness, the geographical north initially appears to be Alexandre's salvation merely through its existence. The first night he

lapses into a profound sleep in which his tormented mind is cleansed and then freed: "The greatest gift of all is sleep so deep that it resembles death. It not only refreshes his body but infuses him with the spiritual strength to desire a new life".<sup>14</sup> The peace of the sleep, like his unequalled joy of the one special day in the north, is illusive in its brevity. Alexandre feels reborn (Cash, 127), but his return to the city reveals the extent of his renewal. Roy comments cynically that "through sleep God permitted His creature from time to time to believe that he was free" (Cash, 124); the transience of Alexandre's joy and even Doctor Hudon's ease, indeed, seem to be similar frauds perpetrated by a jesting Almighty.

Alexandre's sleep is purposeful for the reader, however, because it foreshadows, in the depth of its tranquillity, the total freedom which is available solely beyond death. The north may have ultimately failed to satisfy the cashier's longings for an earthly paradise (Cash, 137), but it did, for a few days, reveal to him the unlimited happiness of the simple, honest, northern life. North becomes more and more a spiritual ideal for Alexandre; beyond his hopeless imaginings of a life as a trapper or lumberjack (Cash, 160), the north becomes his ideal conception of the after-life:

For long moments he thought that if he could only put in his two cents, Heaven would be perfect. He saw just about how it could be worked out: a vast series--but

well protected and hidden from each other  
by greenery--of small cabins like his at  
Lac Vert. What better could a man ask?

(Cash, 198)

The contentment which Alexandre finds in the spirit of the northern environment is typical of the northern novel. Out of such hopefulness, in spite of his imminent death, also grows a new love for humanity by which Alexandre redeems his lonely, struggling life.

Vitality and hope do, indeed, arise from the death of the small cashier. Alexandre himself admits his personal love for "ordinary men" (Cash, 209), and he expresses the sincerity of his regenerated affections through the very warm and loving comfort which he gives to his sick neighbour in the hospital (Cash, 187-188). The spontaneity and honesty of the touch of his hand unite Alexandre, for the first time, with the sufferings of humanity. He begins to love sincerely the presence of people in his room (Cash, 196), yet senses the pain which the young girls undergo when they see him; he gruffly dismisses them (Cash, 197) in spite of his pleasure at their visit.

Alexandre's love of mankind most importantly revitalizes the priest who attends him in the hospital. Shielded from the pain and despair of his sick parishioners by doctrinal formula, the priest is unfeeling in the performance of his duties. He only loves man through the strict service of an otherworldly divinity, and judges man

rigidly according to absolute law. Alexandre jolts the priest from his cold detachment through his real, human problems and shows him the vital necessity of loving man on an immediate, personal, human level.

Such interactions with other men are expressions of the vitality which Alexandre evokes out of his nearness to death. Having existed alone for his whole life, painfully aware that his problem was apathy--"Not to have loved enough when it was the time for love" (Cash, 34)--Alexandre struggles in his final days of life to touch the hearts of those around him. He can neither repair his sterile past nor return to his blessed Lac Vert, but he can give some small comforts to others for the future: "There can be no return to the garden, but meekness and love can plant flowers in the cage and the wasteland".<sup>15</sup> Alexandre's gifts to other men, indeed, seem diminutive: the sincere, hopeful letters to Godias and Eugénie, the comfort to his sick neighbour, his example of human love which frees the priest to act, and above all, the courage with which he faces his pain and inevitable end. The acts are intensely personal, but they are committed in the spirit of boundless humanitarianism. Such is the life which arises from his death and which encourages many to revere his memory by continuing his struggle with courage and love against the injustices of existence.

Neil Fraser, McCourt's protagonist in Music at the

Close, also achieves a "small" victory for the price of his death, but like Alexandre Chenevert, it is only through death that his life will have any meaning. Such a triumph is akin "to the Absurdist's resignation to a world without deliverance, where human dignity feeds on an inner conquest".<sup>16</sup> The victories are no less admirable and effective for their intimacy, because the strength of the personal achievements of Alexandre and Neil transcends the level of a personal salvation. Their deaths presumably touch all who knew them with hopefulness, warmth and love, a final affirmation of the human community which justifies the pain of their lives and their deaths.

The "God-forsaken wilderness"<sup>17</sup> in which Neil Fraser matures is the prairie of the Canadian West. Unlike the north of The Cashier, which gives vitality and rebirth to Alexandre Chenevert, the wilderness which surrounds Neil is incessant in its physical and psychological threats to man. Neil is initially struck powerfully by the loneliness of the prairie (MC, 16). He comes to assume, after his awareness of Uncle Matt's futile struggles (MC, 41) and his own desperate attempts to farm, the essentially cynical vision of man's survival in the hostile northern environment: "And it would always be like this---always the unrelenting struggle against an environment that was either too hot or too cold, or dusty or muddy, but never equable, never kindly" (MC, 183).

Even before such despair overcomes Neil, the prairie and particularly the deep darkness of its night, assaults his youthful sensitivities. Neil is an orphan, notably, and the cries of the coyote leave him fearfully grasping for some security and comforting warmth:

Neil wanted his mother, not the angels of God. He tried to imagine her by the side of his bed, speaking softly to him, tucking in the sheet, perhaps, and telling him to sleep soundly. But his imagination was not strong enough to triumph over the reality. His mother did not come, would never come again. (EC, 23)

Neil is alone and afraid, and the prairie, awesome in its loneliness, size and apparent cruelty, drives him deeper and deeper into himself in search of some protection. His imagination blossoms and comes to his aid, but it also creates the barrier which, at the same time, increasingly alienates him from reality. Like Len Sterner, Neil relies more upon the dreamy fantasy of his own imagination than he does upon reality, and consequently, divorces himself more completely from the people who inhabit the real, objective world. His imagination, ironically, tends to intensify the essential loneliness which it had seemed initially to repair.

Neil's imagination gives him the confidence, in the beginning, to seek lofty goals of education and economic prosperity. He dreams of being a successful novelist (MC, 82), and his reading of Tennyson's "Ulysses" awakens in him "a longing for something that had no concrete substance"

(MC, 136). His overestimation of Moira's affection for him gives incentive, too, for his studies (MC, 100). Such impulsion is helpful if it urges him to struggle with the hardships of life in order to discover his human limitations and to achieve his goal in reality. Neil naïvely admits, however, in a moment of unsuspecting truth, that he contemplates his experiences in order "to twist a thousand wonderful meanings from them" (MC, 92). Neil's dreams tend to become consistent means of escape, rather than inspirations for action to realize such dreams. The dream world of his imagination begins to constitute his reality, and such a reliance upon his self-centred vision is his wilderness.

One of Neil's pleasures, significantly, is to drift into self-glorifying fantasies, "daydreams, which were as frequent and as real as ever" (MC, 77; 88-89); he even has a "favourite dream" (MC, 57). His worship of his ideal conceptions of Charlie Steele and Helen Martell initiates, perhaps, the most far-reaching damage to his active imagination. Their respective falls in his fantasy-- Charlie's death and Helen's departure--create a wide breach in his mind which makes repair contingent upon immediate unitive action. Rather than accepting the cruelty of reality and then striving to make life more agreeable by performing acts of warm love and selfless kindness, Neil pursues more and more the distant, unattainable goals posed by his own mind. He continues to write, for example,

hoping to receive overnight acclaim, even though his multitude of incomplete poems, his numerous rejections from periodicals, and his disastrously poor English essay indicate his inability to write well. His love for Moira, similarly, is blind and idealistic, and prevents him from associating with pleasant girls like Helen Mulholland. His only accomplishments occur, notably, in baseball and football, games which, unlike reality, have rules of fair play and permit periodic success. Neil sees such possibility in his own life, unaware as he is of the frequency of death, despair and failure.

Neil's relationship with Moira exemplifies most clearly, in fact, his naïve, self-centred vision of life. Women for Neil are soft, pure creatures, not the type to survive in the wilderness, but exactly the stuff on which his imagination thrives (MC, 82). As Len Sterner's imaginings of his Lydia will not admit the truth, so Neil's relationship with Moira lacks the loving qualities of real, human interactions, warmth and tenderness. His love letter to her at Christmas does not proclaim his love for her or his need for her presence, but it provides a forum, on the other hand, for his attempts at literary criticism. Citing Rupert Brooke and "making appropriate comments" (MC, 102), Neil appeals to the Moira of his mind, the unreal Moira who will worship him forever (MC, 110). Neil imprisons her in his imagination, and Moira chastises him for such naïve



idealism:

"Neil, a woman likes to be put on a pedestal. But she doesn't want to stay there. Gil knew that. But apparently you didn't."

. . . . .

"Neil, why don't you try living in the real world for a while? It's more honest--and more heroic." (MC, 167; 168)

Neil has retreated too far into his own world, however, and no one's warnings, including Moira's, can pierce the wilderness of his cramped imagination.

Neil's marriage to Moira only intensifies his internal problems because the cruel reality of their subsistence farming is too painful for him to admit. He lacks the strength, either spiritual or physical, to bring the farm a profit (MC, 185-186; 191-192), and he devotes more time to his thoughtful reveries than he does to his chores. He only awakens from his dreamy silences to elucidate his vague fantasies of success in the northern Peace River country (MC, 183-184). The incongruity of his visions with his present situation does not urge him into action, however, but rather mires him in passive sadness and self-pity; he merely observes, for example, the discrepancy between his ideal conception of marriage and parenthood and the reality of those states of life (MC, 175; 188). The promise of a son initiates, furthermore, not rebirth and happiness for Neil, as for Salverson's Lindals and Watson's James Potter, but "bitterness, and a slowly

gathering resentment against the woman who indirectly had helped to fashion his chains" (MC, 187). The child reminds him of his responsibilities as a farmer, a father and a husband. He greets the struggles which such duties involve with the passive fear and self-centred dreaming which has characterized all his former confrontations with the harshness and chance of objective reality.

Such inactivity may initially have saved Neil from pain and worry, but it eventually prolongs his imprisonment in his childish escapism: "As a child he had hated to surrender his dreams; and in many respects he was a child still" (MC, 171). Unlike Brian O'Connal, who learns to confront the death and despair of existence, Neil finds comfort in his boyhood dreaming, and comes to rely wholly upon such imaginings for security. The deaths of Uncle Matt and Aunt Em shock him, but his responses are neither reverent nor warmly personal. He regrets the death of his aunt, on the other hand, because he now lacks any loving relative or friend (MC, 136); his response is self-centred. Neil briefly notes Uncle Matt's love for the land, but he ignores the strength and sincerity of his life's work. Neil's farming, by contrast, becomes impersonal, an opportunity for quick wealth to satisfy his dreams of material success. His "struggle" is selfish, typically, and blind to the random chance of the stock market. He loses his profits as quickly as he makes them, and immediately

leaves town, submitting to his misfortune in a way which makes his uncle's life-long struggles worthless and futile.

Neil lacks the selfless concern, clearly, to consider the ways in which his actions touch other men. His imagination limits his vision and restricts his interest to his own delusions of importance. The exchange between Gil and Neil after the first riot in the city emphasizes Neil's fear of going beyond himself into the responsible involvement with others:

"it's the finest faith there is. Faith in mankind."

Neil opened his eyes. "Maybe," he said. "But a mighty hard one to hang on to." (MC, 156)

Afraid of personal interaction, inhibited like the cashier of Roy's novel before he confronts death, Neil shrinks from the struggles for justice among men which will not admit the detached, comfortable fantasies of his imagination. He recognizes reality--he admits his selfishness (MC, 155)--but he does not act upon his self-knowledge.

Neil, typically, sees Gil's death as a pointless sacrifice because "It was irrational, without real significance" (MC, 164). He sees that both the miners and the police are "caught in the same trap" (MC, 161), and that Gil died for his beliefs, but he does not relate the insights. Neil is unaware of the importance of Gil's struggles against the injustices of society, his individual assertions of hope and meaning in the face of unyielding,

superhuman forces of fate. Neil's journey to the city does not free him, clearly, because the struggle in which he is engaged transcends the bounds of urban and rural existence. He is unaware of the nobility of simple struggles for meaning and survival, furthermore, because of the repression originally forced upon him by his lonely childhood amid the threatening prairie. Neil admires only the imaginary and the unreal, and the courage of a man like Uncle Matt does not impress him for more than a few brief moments. Only a confrontation with the finality of death seems to liberate Neil, as it does Alexandre Chenevert, from his delusive self-centredness.

Even when he first learns of the war, Neil seems overwhelmed by the glorious possibilities offered by enlistment: "security, excitement, release from the deadly routine of marginal existence" (MC, 214-215), and above all, perhaps, an opportunity for honour, for "music at the close". The reality of "the close" confronts Neil with shattering suddenness, in fact, when an explosion paralyzes him and leaves him awaiting death alone. His contemplations upon his present situation and the human condition, in general, become starkly real and lucid because he is, for the first time, intimately involved with the inevitable fact of death. Neil finally recognizes the pain of life and admits his allegiance to the incessant struggle for human freedom for which Gil died. Gil always fought with vitality,

however, against the stern, impersonal reality reflected in prairie life, and Neil can rely upon no such past. Only with death, Neil realizes, can his life achieve any semblance of meaning:

For now it seemed to matter more than anything else in the world that Ian should be proud of him. And in a flash of illumination Neil knew that this could never be if he lived.

.....  
 Nothing that he had done in his life before this day had any meaning. His death was the only justification for his having lived at all. (MC, 216; 217)

Neil's gradual immersion in the ease and peace of death grants him the comfort which both life, in its struggles, and his imagination, in its otherworldliness, could never really offer him.

Neil enters McCourt's story as an orphan, and he departs from it alone, too. McCourt's conclusion to Music at the Close indicates that Neil has, at last, managed to achieve some vaguely personal contact with humanity. By dying for his country and for the memory by which his son may now honour him, Neil becomes uniquely selfless, hoping to create life and inspiration for others instead of for himself. Unlike Grove's Len Sterner, who commits suicide to satisfy his own desire for peace of mind, Neil sees in death an opportunity to redeem a life of self-centredness. Neither Neil nor Alexandre Chenevert actually have any choice whether they will die or not--the fact has been decided by forces beyond their control--but their

selflessness in their final helpless moments will hopefully initiate, in turn, creative thoughts and acts in others trapped in the struggle for physical and psychological survival. Such vital inspiration, intended for others, will justify the errors, the pain and the confusion of their lives.

Brian O'Connal also "grows" from experiences of death and the cruelty of reality, but his coming to awareness is marked by the naïveté of a child rather than by the gripping self-centredness of Alexandre and Neil. Who Has Seen the Wind elucidates, significantly, the childhood out of which grows the northern hero. Brian, with his innate desire to know, will be committed to struggle as a man because his childhood in the northern environment---in this case, the prairie---shows him the necessity of a confident, active response to the surrounding wilderness. Brian's initial wilderness is his youthful ignorance, but he becomes increasingly aware that his childhood experiences of "the feeling" have only prepared him for a more threatening wilderness, the wilderness of adult recognition of the random chance of life.

The physical wilderness, the prairie, intensifies the effects of Brian's painful initiation into the cruel facts of life merely by its flatness: "Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements

simply of land and sky--Saskatchewan prairie".<sup>18</sup> On the open prairie Brian is very alone, aware not only of the landscape's apparent emptiness, but also of his own upright presence there. He is more conscious than other boys of his age of the novel feelings and experiences which daily bombard a child because he is innately receptive to others. Unlike his friend Artie, who is significantly apathetic about the fundamental qualities of life--the wind (WSW, 191), birth (WSW, 203), and death (WSW, 192)--Brian is eager to know why things happen. His desire will be the cause of his moments of despair, however, because in seeking the sunlight of creation and God, he must also accept the complementary darkness, a necessity which Sheila Watson termed the double hook. Unlike McCourt's Neil Fraser, who retreats from life into fantasy, Brian seeks to confront reality and understand it.

Various wildernesses surround Brian in the small town, but he is too young to recognize their power: the social wilderness ruled by Mrs. Abercrombie (WSW, 48) and her daughter (WSW, 158) which eventually drives old Wong to suicide, the educational wilderness seen by Mr. Digby in his own school (WSW, 73; 76), and the economic wilderness of the depression (WSW, 171) which Bent Candy darkens even more with his greed (WSW, 212). Brian perhaps senses the social problems, but he feels more intensely a "new uncertainty" (WSW, 209), what might be the confusion of a

boy being thrust irrevocably into the paradoxes of adult understanding:

It wouldn't be so bad, Brian thought, if a person knew, or even knew what it was he wanted to know.

. . . . .

And yet for breathless moments he had been alive as he had never been before, passionate for the thing that slipped through the grasp of his understanding and eluded him. If only he could throw his cap over it; if it were something that a person could trap. If he could lie outstretched on the prairie while he lifted one edge of his cap and peeked under to see. That was all he wanted--one look. More than anything! (WSW, 198; 199)

What Brian seeks to capture is "the feeling", a strange, thrilling experience of simultaneous pain and joy. His quest involves the movement from his childhood innocence, through the initiating experiences of the feeling, toward the mature consciousness of an adult.

Brian must learn to accept the inevitable alternations of life and death, light and darkness, and hope and despair which form "the cycle of life".<sup>19</sup> He must accustom himself to the impersonal chance of the human condition, what Len Sterner aptly called "'the presence of death'" (YL, 309). Mitchell carefully encompasses his young protagonist with scenes exemplifying the cyclical rhythm of existence, where life can be found beside death. The prairie town, for example, comes alive in Brian's eyes as the day ends (WSW, 60-61), and he significantly learns of his father's death at sunrise (WSW, 237). Brian experiences a sense of terrible finality when his father



dies, but out of his despair arises a new sense of "other"---an increased tenderness and love for his family (WSW, 251)---which justifies his father's death.

Mitchell also distinguishes, to some extent, between the city and the prairie in the effects of the respective environments upon their inhabitants. Mrs. Abercrombie, for example, represents, in her racism and her tyrannical rule of the town's educational system, the worst qualities of the pretentious Main Street matron. The city consciousness seems to suppress natural, loving feelings in man, preventing any meaningful interrelationships; several people, including Brian, his grandmother and the supposedly sincere Reverend Powelly, can only manage to say, repetitively, "He was a fine man" (WSW, 241-244) in memory of Gerald O'Connal. The epithet may be a defense mechanism for the speaker's mind, and perhaps excusable for someone as young as Brian, but it still indicates a desire to escape confrontation with the reality of death and sadness.

The prairie is the place of sensitivity and redemption, on the other hand, from which arise Saint Sammy and the Young Ben, the figures who assist Brian, for better or worse, in his journey to understanding. The progress of Brian's quest depends, in fact, upon the presence of the prairie, either physically in the landscape or spiritually in the Young Ben. Nature's power increasingly impresses upon Brian the duality of life, the paradox which permits

the existence of both gentleness, kindness and life, and harshness, savagery and death. Brian feels alone on the expansive prairie after his father's death, but it is the meadow lark which shatters his personal sadness and turns him back into the vital involvement with others (WSW, 246-247). Brian's grandmother dies alone in her room, but nature comforts her, too, with a blessing of white snow and a peaceful reunion with the earth.

The wind also compels Brian toward understanding by its baffling oscillations between being a force of life and meaning amid the dead prairie (WSW, 246), and being a power threatening man with its wild moanings "fading into nothingness" (WSW, 20; 94-95). Mitchell reminds the reader that the wind is often seen as a manifestation of God's power,<sup>20</sup> and, indeed, Brian's vision of the Almighty possesses a duality not unlike that of the wind (WSW, 98). Brian's quest is to come to the purposeful acknowledgement of such essential facts of human experience, accepting both elements of the contrast as necessary and real.

The Young Ben is a major force in Brian's acceptance of life's puzzling circumstances because it is he who "owns" the prairie (WSW, 12; 59). Young Ben, in fact, seems to be an incarnation of the prairie itself. He is frequently described through images of the prairie's wind, animals and birds (WSW, 24; 88; 101; 127; 147). He is, like the wind, a primitive force, impersonal and spontaneous in his

actions, and moved by fundamental feelings of love and hate. Young Ben is a paradox, too, comforting Brian with his deep tenderness at times of death, pain and fear (WSW, 43; 58-59; 92-93; 94), and showing him a wild, terrible fury when he turns upon Miss MacDonald and Artie because they violate his sense of justice and dignity (WSW, 93; 126-127).

Brian comes to associate the Young Ben not only with the excitement which he feels in his company, but also with the amoral power of nature to which the Young Ben seems subservient:

Prairie's awful, thought Brian, and in his mind there loomed vaguely fearful images of a still and brooding spirit, a quiescent power unsmiling from everlasting to everlasting to which the coming and passing of the prairie's creatures was but incidental. He looked out over the spreading land under intensely blue sky. The Young Ben was part of all this. (WSW, 128-129)

The Young Ben begins to exemplify for Brian nature in its stark reality, beautiful at times and horrifying at others, beyond moral responsibility. Brian defines Saint Sammy with a similar duality, "with a staring fixity and an indefinable mixture of wildness and mildness" (WSW, 194). Such a difficult combination of emotions is, nevertheless, the vision of life which Brian must, at least, acknowledge in order to come to terms with reality.

Brian's special "feeling" is also "an indefinable mixture", a simultaneous pain and joy which recall the death-like ecstasies of mystical experience. He is filled

with "the strange elation" (WSW, 122) at diverse times, but he feels it most intensely when encompassed by the prairie, its elements or its inhabitants--the animals, the Young Ben or Saint Sammy. He experiences the beauty in leaves wet with dew (WSW, 107-108), the vitality and strength of horses (WSW, 175), and the warmth and security of love in his mother's arms (WSW, 210). Each he knows through the intensity of his "feeling".

Brian feels the "bitter-sweet sensation" (WSW, 176) rising at other very different moments: the painful memory of his raindrop (WSW, 110-112), the disgust at Artie's mutilation of the gopher (WSW, 128), the sight of the two-headed calf (WSW, 176-177), and the intense hunger which grips him after he runs away from Ab (WSW, 237). Brian's sensitivity enables him, furthermore, to glimpse the distinctions between the subtle variations which his feeling undergoes. The change in Brian is, indeed, not a specific development to be confined to one situation, but rather the progression of his whole being towards a concept of individuality. He senses, in his own terms, "an experience of apartness" (WSW, 237), and "that ringing awareness of himself" (WSW, 270). Brian is growing up, and his "feeling" is the pain of that growth and rebirth into adulthood.

Brian's struggles to comprehend his feeling are but the beginning of his attempts to survive in the wildernesses

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of nature and man in which, as a human being, he must learn to live; the childhood struggles only initiate him into the adult struggles. He feels the dread which accompanies the sense of death's inevitability, the futility of trying to carve warmth out of the impersonal human situation, but he endures the pain and vows to continue his quest for understanding:

His feeling had something to do with dying; it had something to do with being born. Loving something and being hungry were with it too . . . There was the prairie; there was a meadow lark, a baby pigeon, and a calf with two heads. In some haunting way the Ben was part of it. So was Mr. Digby . . . Some day. The thing could not hide from him forever. (WSW, 299)

His determination to seek "the thing" testifies to the value of his childhood experiences. Aware of life's potential cruelty and injustices, and the equal possibility for goodness and love--sometimes in the same person--Brian will learn to engage in the adult struggle for meaning. Primitive, animalistic forces, led by the Young Ben and Saint Sammy, have tempted him to follow their chaotic methods, but he seems to sense the incongruity of such a response within the human community. Like Digby and Miss Thompson, city-dwellers who possess the "prairie" consciousness of honesty and brave, decisive action, Brian will fight against the Mrs. Abercrombies and the Bent Candys in an effort to establish more firmly among men the warmth and vitality which he had sometimes felt as a child.<sup>21</sup> He

will become more and more sensitive to life and death, Watson's double hook, aware that he is caught in the constant interplay of greater forces of time and weather, but insistent in his desire to make a meaningful life in spite of his human susceptibility.

### III

The novels of the third section, Over Prairie Trails, White Narcissus, and the third part of Where Nests the Water Hen, emphasize without reservation the love and community feeling which can operate and develop during an individual's incessant struggle with the forces of nature and man. The vitality and optimism which are released during the series of journeys by Grove, after the quest by Richard Milne to his home, and through the trip north by Father Joseph-Marie initiate a creative power among men which relies not upon death for its motivating force, but solely upon the unitive and reparative powers of love exuded by the protagonist.

Grove's Over Prairie Trails is not only the simple diary of a naturalist's travels, but also the record of a sensitive artist's struggles against the elements. The determination with which Grove confronts the wilderness, and his exhilaration in that confrontation expresses effectively, furthermore, the paradox inherent in the vision of the northern novel: the wilderness is both a

scene of pain and perilous struggle, and a place of revelation, vitality, rebirth and artistic inspiration. Grove elucidates the intensity of such contrastive feelings in Over Prairie Trails, and creates, in this way, a verbal expression of the northern mood which the Group of Seven often captured in their pictorial art.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of his love for nature, Grove is always acutely conscious of the random chance and danger of northern life. He echoes Kolm, Len Sterner's step-father, when he says near the beginning of his first journey: "The wilderness uses human material up".<sup>23</sup> His most dangerous trip, significantly, is the winter journey described in the fourth chapter of Over Prairie Trails, where the physical and psychological threats by the environment are peculiarly intense; Grove's hardships pointedly emphasize that "the true and only season here [in Canada] is winter".<sup>24</sup> The north impresses Grove repeatedly during this trip with its impersonal coldness:

Altogether there was an impression of barren, wild, bitter-cold windiness about the aspect that did not fail to awe my mind; it looked inhospitable, merciless, and cruelly playful. (OPT, 66)

Grove observes often the objective reality of the wilderness, noting at different times the struggles for survival with which the elements test man (OPT, 59; 63).

The physical struggle is but one of the awesome confrontations with the north in which man engages. The



conflicts and fears which arise within man as a result of nature's direct threats, or solely through nature's existence, often drive man deeper into a loneliness which makes both spiritual and physical death inevitable. The loneliness induced by the northern environment in Len Sterner, Pierre Cadorai and Neil Fraser makes death the only meaningful and creative act in their lives of which they are conscious.

Grove faces awesome obstacles on his journeys, and he, too, experiences momentary dread in the face of nature's power. Grove feels helpless, at the mercy of the impersonal spirit which seems to inhabit the surrounding wilderness (OPT, 73-74). He senses that he is an "intruder" (OPT, 74), trespassing in the realm of the northern spirit, and suffering a fearful vertigo because of his involvement in a struggle beyond the capacities of his humanity:

It looked so harsh, so millennial-old, so antediluvian and pre-Adamic! I still remember with particular distinctness, the slight dizziness that overcame me, the sinking feeling in my heart, the awe, and the foreboding that I had challenged a force in Nature which might defy all tireless effort and the most fearless heart. (OPT, 72)

Grove endures the dangers in the brave manner of the typical northern hero who is unsure of his own strength, but nevertheless courageous in the face of overwhelming odds.

The fog which encompasses him in the journey of the

second chapter subtly inspires a fear in Grove which seems more terrifying than the openly dangerous encounters with the gigantic snowdrifts. Grove experiences more intensely the threats of non-being as he slowly makes his way through the fog. Life becomes "a series of negatives" (OPT, 27), and "the misty impenetrability of the atmosphere was appalling" (OPT, 26). Grove becomes seriously disorientated in the dense fog, losing touch with the subjective reality of his mind (OPT, 40) as well as with the objective reality of his surroundings. Such total control which the north may exert at random times over man's existence indicates the fundamental quality of the struggles which occur in the wilderness: "Nature strips down our pretences with a relentless finger, and we stand, bare of disguises, as helpless failures" (OPT, 118). Grove comments upon the human condition in this way in Chapter Six of Over Prairie Trails, but the observation is accurate for the northern experience as a whole. The north dwarfs man physically with the awesome power of its elements, and threatens him further through the despair which man feels in the shadow of such large, impersonal forces.

Grove is not a firm enemy of nature, however, and he endures her moments of cruelty so that he may relish her innocent vitality and peace. Grove, like Lawren Harris, is an artist whose spirit lies irrevocably in the redemptive north:

From his particular love, and in the process of creating from it, [the artist] is led inevitably to universal qualities and toward a universal vision and understanding. These are the fruits of a natural growth having its roots deep in the soil of the land, its life in the pervading and replenishing spirit of the North, and its heart-beat one with the life of its people.<sup>25</sup>

The struggles with the northern environment are frequent in Over Prairie Trails, but Grove's home, the goal of six of his seven journeys and the centre of his life with its love, warmth and security, also significantly lies to the north. North specifically connotes happiness for Grove, another typical response of the northern novelist to his environment.

Grove divides the north from the south very explicitly, furthermore, with a wooden bridge which he must cross just north of the town in which he teaches. North of that bridge he lives in a world of natural beauty, and in expectation of the reunion with his family. South of that bridge lies the town toward which he travels only in Chapter Five, the place which offers no comforting welcome for him:

The livery stable was deserted. I had to open the doors, to drive in, to unhitch, to unharness, and to feed the horses myself. And then I went home to my cold and lonesome house.

It was a cheerless night. (OPT, 115)

The significant loneliness and dejection of the one journey south to the city<sup>26</sup> is common to Grove's other novels, too,

where the south is associated with the degenerate, divisive city, and the north with love, the noble struggle with nature, and spiritual redemption.

Grove specifies his division between the city and the wilderness, in fact, in his Author's Preface to Over Prairie Trails: "I love Nature more than Man . . . I disliked the town, the town disliked me".<sup>27</sup> Grove's scattered observations in Over Prairie Trails emphasize his aversion to the urban environment, and the city's deleterious effects upon the paradisaical north of his vision. Man cannot dwell in harmony with nature, apparently, without scarring part of the environment. Such "sins of utility" (OPT, 53) taint the beauty and the reparative power of the north, and only an exertion of nature's own strength, in the snows of winter, can redeem man's "silly pretensions" (OPT, 56). The vision of the north as a place of redemption and rebirth is, perhaps, captured no more concisely than in the natural process through which the snow beautifies the scarred land.

Grove's sensitivities rest with nature, clearly, as he himself admits, but the central principle of his being, notably, is a commitment to selflessness: "Unless we throw ourselves into something outside of our own personality, life is apt to impress us as a great mockery" (OPT, 118). Grove affirms the community with his sympathies, and releases a unitive power through such belief which eases his

incessant struggle with the human condition. He finds comfort during his journeys, for example, in his simple awareness of the vitality of the environment. He enjoys the flights of the birds over the prairie (OPT, 6), and feels kinship with a wolf that lingers near the trail (OPT, 7-8).

Such creatures are the inhabitants of Grove's "beautiful wilderness" (OPT, 6), the north which inspires in him a deep affection for its peace and innocence. The animals assure him "of the absolute friendliness of all creation" (OPT, 13), and more often than not, Grove responds to the landscape with love and sensitive appreciation of its beauty (OPT, 48-49; 52-53). He makes the significant comment "that the Kingdom of Heaven lies all around us" (OPT, 99), and the image is important because it points to the almost mystical quality which invests some of his observations of nature. The huge snowdrifts of the journey of Chapter Four raise his fear to a peak of emotional, "otherworldly" intensity, but a moment of surpassing feeling in another ride expresses more effectively the extent of Grove's involvement with nature:

The very fact of its straightness, flanked as it was by the rows of frosted trees, seemed like a call. And a feeling that is very familiar to me--that of an eternity in the perpetuation of whatever may be the state I happen to be in, came over me, and a desire to go on and on, for ever, and to see what might be beyond. (OPT, 54)

The desire to continue, in spite of the obstacles encountered, understandably drives Grove as it ultimately

does his protagonists in Settlers of the Marsh and Fruits of the Earth.

Grove's struggles against the elements and the fear encompassing him in the prairie darkness do not exclude humanity like the conflicts of Pierre Cadrai and Len Sterner; Grove relies significantly upon the love which he feels for his waiting family. He admits his own exhilaration at open confrontation with nature (OPT, 58), but the essential, motivating force for his endurance and persistence in his journeys is emphatically the warmth of his family and home (OPT, 31-32; 62; 72). Perhaps in no other northern novel discussed in this thesis are the unitive and reparative powers of the north for man better expressed than in the comfort and love which Grove finds at the completion of each of his six struggling journeys northward.

Raymond Knister's Richard Milne also finds love at the end of his northern quest, but Milne's individual struggles with the sterility and inactivity which brood over the environment seem more complex than Grove's seven journeys. Knister's protagonist is confronted with a decay of the human spirit, a disease which emanates diabolically from one family to infect the surrounding landscape and its inhabitants. Richard encourages the decisive action which will shatter the silence which has made the land infertile. His incessant prodding of Ada

seems to inject, indeed, the vitality which is needed to liberate the Lethens from their prison. Both nature and man ultimately achieve freedom.

Richard Milne initially finds the landscape barren and oppressive, a "place of eroded dreams"<sup>28</sup> where vitality and fertility are suspended. The land is cold and silent, caught in an unnatural stasis (WN, 35). Nature is not alive and physically threatening, as it often is for Grove in Over Prairie Trails, but rather "barrenly flourishing to the darkening oblivious forests" (WN, 43), awesome in its massive impersonal presence. Richard is immediately impressed by the mood of confinement which hovers over his former home, and his own intended action stamps him as "an alien" (WN, 11) to such pervasive apathy. He is alone, clearly, in his quest for love and self-justification in the wilderness.

The focus of the illness which plagues the region is the Lethen family, and the "generation long quarrel" (WN, 45) which has placed both husband and wife in a prolonged, divisive silence. The intense negativity of such a marriage seems to spread over the countryside, instilling the sterility to which Richard is sensitive:

It was what the man had told of the Lethens which bothered him . . . Richard could not help wondering whether all the neighbours were so deeply concerned, whether an atmosphere had not been caused to rise about these people which would for ever forbid his imposing reality or

recognition upon them. In what reality did they believe? (WN, 91; 92)

The Lethen farm house itself reflects the destructive power of the mood emanating from within it through its physical decay, discolouration and erosion (WN, 109).

The Lethens themselves suffer incessant torment, understandably, because they inhabit--they, in fact, are--the darkest core of the wilderness in White Narcissus. Ada, the daughter whom Richard Milne seeks to liberate, is caught within the silence of her parents, "an image of sleet frozen upon maple buds" (WN, 48). The quarrel of her parents chains her spiritually even more than the neighbours, and she is, indeed, essentially dead; she denies her creative potential in music (WN, 100) and love (WN, 122) because such hopefulness is non-existent in the Lethens' confined world. The land is "a prison cell" (WN, 180), mired in its own barrenness and divided from the outside world by barriers of indifference and coldness.

Mrs. Lethen's white narcissus, oppressive and funereal in its heavy scent, exemplifies the destructive force which the long quarrel has unleashed. Devoted to her flowers, which become almost perverse in the power which they hold over her, Mrs. Lethen often becomes entranced before them (WN, 51; 53). The blossoms become her "lovers" in a self-satisfying relationship to which no loving human being would agree (WN, 116). Grove, at least, loved his family with a tenderness equal to his affection for nature,



but Mrs. Lethen uses her flowers selfishly to dispel her loneliness. The white narcissus grips Mrs. Lethen's awareness, drawing her deeper into her own illusions and farther away from the liberating love of her husband and the community. Such is the internal, self-destruction which holds the whole land, denying freedom to the inhabitants and compelling them to deteriorate slowly in their inactivity.

Richard Milne comes north like a questing knight to liberate both the land from its oppression and himself from his stifling past. Richard has, admittedly, found material prosperity in the city to the south, but he must necessarily return to the north to free himself from the pain of his unrequited love for Ada. The Lethens' power has clearly held part of Richard's consciousness even while he lived in the city (WN, 13), however, and before the north frees him, his actual presence in the wilderness further stifles his creative impulses. He falls deeper into the monotonous pattern which seems to imprison the whole land: "a part taken in the farmer's routine put him back into that state of wilfully resigned hopeless longing of his early years" (WN, 134).

Knister hints that his protagonist's struggle involves an opponent of awesome, inhuman, impersonal power, but that the cyclical rhythm reflecting such overwhelming power admits rebirth as well as death:

In winter, spring, autumn, it's good to come and see that there is growth, change, and death, nothing of which is bitter or gay, simply because it does return again. It does return again. (WN, 94)

The hope in the cycle, however much man is subservient to its irrevocable movement, is the optimism of the man very aware of the human condition, but still committed to the struggle for the smallest semblance of warmth, vitality and meaning.

The stoic endurance through which Ada Lethen has survived the wilderness of her family is an inactive, albeit brave stance to have adopted. She may, indeed, survive the silent, uneasy tension of her existence there, but such an unfeeling posture also detaches her from deeply human interactions which can completely liberate her:

Her lips showed nothing of submission or revolt, nothing of joy or despair, in repose nothing but a sweet calm and an understanding sympathy not to be betrayed into sentimental sorrow, a calm sweetness never to be betrayed into hasty greed of sensation. (WN, 205-206)

The divisive force which has held Ada for a generation makes her insensible to Richard Milne's urgent demands for action (WN, 136; 224). Like Ostenso's Ellen Gare, who refuses to choose the path of her lover Malcolm, Ada initially balks at Richard's calls for decision, and seems doomed to emotional imprisonment within her own family.

Richard is insistent in his quest to bring vitality back into their lives, and he brings her several times into

the protection and warmth of love's tenderness (WN, 46-47; 119-120; 225). Such is Richard's redemptive function in White Narcissus, to encourage life in a wilderness subtly ravaged by a death of the human spirit. He sees himself as a unitive force who can assist the Lethens with their internal problems (WN, 101-102; 105-106; 183), and even drive them towards a compromise for the sake of Ada and himself: "He pictured himself standing between the ageing man and woman, impelling them to speak, to know each other" (WN, 178-179). Richard seems an insignificant opponent to the impersonality and division of the wilderness and the society tainted by the Lethens, but the incessance of his struggle for Ada initiates the action which begins the land's rebirth. Drawing Ada into an open expression of love in their sexual union (WN, 233-234), Richard shows her the clarity and warmth of feeling in the "outside world" from which he comes. The unity of their embrace creates the first moment of pure optimism in White Narcissus and foreshadows their final joyous liberation.

Ada's ecstatic tears are the human equivalent of the heavy rains which seem to purge the land of its barren dryness, and permit the rebirth of nature in bright, clean vitality:

Bright sunlight entered the dim kitchen.

. . . . .  
 In high spirits . . . he trudged to the  
 field . . . He was breathing the freshness  
 of the morning air, the new warmth after  
 the heavy rains . . . He lifted his head to

the sky, blue with thronging white clouds. (WN, 235; 236)

Ada has been given hope and nature has experienced rebirth, but the Lethens themselves, the husband and the wife, are still divided. Ada cannot be totally free until their dark wilderness achieves some light.

As Ada hints earlier in the novel (WN, 94), creation and life evolves from death in the cyclical rhythm which encompasses man. Indeed, Mr. Lethen's mad destruction of the narcissi shocks both him and Mrs. Lethen into communication. Both Ada and Mrs. Lethen, once so entrapped by the flowers' influence, seem to assume briefly the funereal coldness and stiff whiteness of the narcissi (WN, 252; 253) at the moment of Mr. Lethen's decisive action; the flowers seem to exert their greatest power at the imminence of their obliteration. Each woman recovers from the brink of death, however, and purged of the plague which has gripped them for a generation, turns to her mate for love. The light in Ada's eyes emphasizes the life which has suddenly arisen in the dark night of the Lethens' wilderness.

Richard Milne succeeds in his quest for love by bringing a spirit of warmth and vitality into the north. Fearful of the Lethens' stifling power over the community and aware of the almost sympathetic barrenness of the landscape, Richard must struggle continually to win Ada. He reveals to her the potential freedom in love, but only when her father catches Richard's mood of decision and

smashes the symbolic flowers does the family's freedom become complete. North, typically, is the place of rebirth.

The decisive action and unification in selfless love which redeem the Lethens and Richard Milne in White Narcissus are, significantly, the redemptive qualities which make the vision of the northern novel in Canada vital and hopeful. The last work under discussion in this thesis, the third part of Gabrielle Roy's Where Nests the Water Hen, elucidates the significance of an individual's love for humanity in the story of Father Joseph-Marie; a Capuchin friar of northern Manitoba, the diminutive priest works with unceasing energy against man's human condition.

Father Joseph-Marie journeys into the wilderness of Manitoba's lake district, a sparsely populated region which threatens its inhabitants with coldness and loneliness. The priest's encounters with the environment are less important to him, however, than are his conflicts with the wilderness of the human soul. He is a simple, devout man, but like Roy's cashier, Alexandre Chenevert, he is puzzled by the many paradoxes of God's Creation. Northern life instills in the priest the importance of survival, but the demands of the worldly life often conflict with the duties to his spirit and his God. He is caught, in a sense, between his priesthood and his humanity:

An ardent love for the joys of this world, regret at thinking that he would surely have to leave it while he yet hungered for them, at the same time a

desire for the absolute, to find himself at last face to face with God--- all these emotions the highly sensuous song of the mulberry bush strangely stimulated in the priest's heart.<sup>29</sup>

In a land where expressions of warmth and affection are the only nourishment upon which the human spirit may feed, Father Joseph-Marie must humanize the esoteric dogma of his church in order to comfort the real pain and sorrow of his northern parishioners. He urges not only divine trust, but also personal expressions of warm human love.

Father Joseph-Marie comes north, like Richard Milne, on a mission of love. The northern environment necessitates such an assertive response to ensure survival, and the practical purpose of the priest's journey is equalled by his own simple joy at spreading love among men. His duty to humanity also leads him south to the city for the halfbreed trappers whom Bessette constantly cheats. For Roy's Capuchin the city represents a paradoxical force which ultimately seems to turn on him. He conscientiously travels to Toronto, the big city in the distant south-east, to obtain fair prices for the fur-trappers of northern Manitoba. They, indeed, achieve payments beyond their wildest dreams, but they squander their profits on extravagant luxuries:

"Here's enough cash for them to drink themselves stupid," Bessette was whispering. "They'll head for town and squander it on all kinds of foolishness."

The Capuchin bowed his head. He felt much more to blame than Bessette could

ever imagine. Sad to say, it was all too true that in proportion as the trappers' incomes increased, they went in more heavily for drink, extravagant clothing for their wives, and the movies at Rorketon. He had thought to labour for their good, and he had perhaps succeeded only in drawing them away from it. (WNWH, 131-132)

As much as he has apparently succeeded economically, so the priest feels that he has failed spiritually: where he has assisted man, he has apparently failed God. The futility of his actions momentarily saddens the Capuchin, but typical of the northern hero, he is shown to be renewed in the selfless devotion to others.

In his visit to the community of the Little Water Hen, Roy's Capuchin radiates a feeling for humanity which seems boundless. His multilingual sermon on the love in God's Creation unites the community through both linguistics and common feeling. The people see their place in the Creation:

Yet since there were so many subjects which drew people together, why not choose one of them? This aged man preached of love, which he would preach from one end of the lake country to the other, and all things served to make it fresh, to keep it living. Motherly devotion, as manifest in the tender care of animals for their young, family relationships, nature, the forest, the trees, the flowers, and the bees--all were put to use. (WNWH, 149)

The Capuchin seeks to "draw people together" in order to create a warmth within the wintry solitude of the north. Roy's final picture of the priest emphasizes his spark of love which is necessary to maintain a meaningful and vital

existence in the frigid north:

Above his old head shone billions of bright stars; in the grass fireflies emitted their brief sparks of light . . . The Capuchin crossed his heavy boots, with their eyelets and tiny hooks. He drew his pipe out of his pocket. He lit it, less because he wanted to smoke than to give the mosquitoes a bit more opposition. Deep within the bluish haze, his eyes sparkled.

To him also the old civilization seemed faraway, lovable, gracious.

The farther he had gone into the North, the more he had been free to love. (WNWH, 159-160)

Roy significantly defines survival in the north in the last lines of her novel. The land is, admittedly, cold and lonely in its natural wilderness. The north is habitable, however, through the freedom which it affords to establish pockets of warm, communal life. The Capuchin, in his desire to give love and happiness to the settlers of the north, triumphs over the loneliness of the land and the spiritual coldness often induced by the environment. Father Joseph-Marie's infusion of vitality, however small it may seem, confronts and momentarily arrests the powers of the wilderness.

Where Nests the Water Hen is a significant novel with which to end this thesis because in the subtly joined tales of the Tousignants and Father Joseph-Marie Gabrielle Roy unites the domestic and the individual responses to the north, and emphasizes, too, the validity



of each. She initially illustrates the psychological as well as the physical threats of the wilderness, both of which must confront any northern traveller or settler. Laying the foundations of her novel with such awesome wildernesses--as she must do in order for her novel to be "northern" in Canada--Roy's essential consideration becomes the selfless struggles in which her characters must engage in order to survive.

Involvement in the struggle alone is not sufficient for individual survival, clearly, as the fates of Len Sterner and Pierre Cadorai exemplify. The sense of community apparently necessary for vital existence in the north is elucidated in the majority of novels under discussion in this thesis, the domestic novels of Chapter Two and the last six novels of Chapter Three. It is such an affirmation of incessant, selfless struggle, against the elements particularly, and against the injustices of the human condition in general, which ultimately signifies the value of the northern novel.

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## REFERENCES

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<sup>9</sup>Chapter Three explains the "other" class of northern novel which is essentially concerned with the individual.

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<sup>28</sup>Grove, Needs to be Said, p. 87.

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<sup>33</sup>Hugh Kenner, "The Case of the Missing Face", in Our Sense of Identity, ed. Malcolm Ross (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954), p. 206.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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<sup>5</sup>Hugh MacLennan, "Prologue" to his Each Man's Son (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), p. xi.

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- <sup>23</sup>Laura Salverson, The Viking Heart (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1947), p. 50.
- <sup>24</sup>Balder's name really foreshadows this happy ending. In Norse mythology, Balder was the god of sunlight, spring and joy.
- <sup>25</sup>Gabrielle Roy, Where Nests the Water Hen, trans. Harry Binsse (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 22.
- <sup>26</sup>Phyllis Grosskurth, Gabrielle Roy (Toronto: Forum House, 1969), p. 27.

## CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>The connection between Knister's tale of rural Ontario and the Grail legends elucidated by Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (New York: Bookman Associates, 1959), is too obvious to be ignored. The specific points of contact are, clearly, the questing knight (Richard Milne) and the sterile countryside which has died through the influence of a lame, sick ruler. The focus of Weston's plague is the Fisher-King, while Knister creates the cold, "northern" environment around the Lethen household.

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<sup>5</sup>For particularly impressive descriptions of such a phenomenon, see Earle Birney, "Bushed", in 20th Century Poetry and Poetics, ed. Gary Geddes (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 188-189, and also Margaret Atwood, Surfacing (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972).

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- <sup>20</sup>Cited from Mitchell's introduction to Who Has Seen the Wind.
- <sup>21</sup>Ronald Sutherland, Second Image (Toronto: New Press, 1971), p. 99.
- <sup>22</sup>J. E. H. MacDonald is cited by A. Y. Jackson, A Painter's Country (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1959), p. 25, as saying that Jackson's Terre Sauvage "looked like the first land that appeared after the flood subsided". A more expressive vision of devastation and purified rebirth cannot, indeed, be imagined, yet such an image captures the north in Canada.
- <sup>23</sup>Frederick P. Grove, Over Frairie Trails (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 11.
- <sup>24</sup>Atwood, Survival, p. 49.
- <sup>25</sup>Harris, Lawren Harris, p. 39.
- <sup>26</sup>It is not important to know in which city Grove taught. "City" for Grove is, particularly, a term connoting certain attitudes and a distinctive life-style.

<sup>27</sup>Grove, Author's Preface to Over Prairie Trails, p. xiii.

<sup>28</sup>Raymond Knister, White Narcissus (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), p. 44.

<sup>29</sup>Gabrielle Roy, Where Nests the Water Hen, p. 120.

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